TO THE REVEREND

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

AND

HEADS OF COLLEGES;

THE FOLLOWING SERMONS,

PREACHED

BY THEIR APPOINTMENT,

ARE

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

INSCRIBED

BY THEIR MUCH OBLIGED

AND MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

GEORGE CROFT.

## *Extract from the laſt Will and Teſtament of the late Reverend* JOHN BAMPTON, *Canon of* Saliſbury.

—— "I give and bequeath my Lands "and Eſtates to the Chancellor, Maſters, "and Scholars of the Univerſity of Oxford "for ever, to have and to hold all and ſingular the ſaid Lands or Eſtates upon truſt, "and to the intents and purpoſes herein after "mentioned; that is to ſay, I will and appoint, that the Vice-Chancellor of the "Univerſity of Oxford for the time being "ſhall take and receive all the rents, iſſues, "and profits thereof, and (after all taxes, "reparations, and neceſſary deductions made) "that he pay all the remainder to the endowment of eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be eſtabliſhed for ever in the ſaid "Univerſity, and to be performed in the "manner following:

"I direct and appoint, that, upon the firſt "Tueſday in Eaſter Term, a Lecturer be "yearly choſen by the Heads of Colleges "only, and by no others, in the room adjoining to the Printing-Houſe, between "the

" the hours of ten in the morning and two
" in the afternoon, to preach eight Divinity
" Lecture Sermons, the year following, at
" St. Mary's in Oxford, between the com-
" mencement of the laſt month in Lent
" Term, and the end of the third week in
" Act Term.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that the eight
" Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be preach-
" ed upon either of the following ſubjects
" — to confirm and eſtabliſh the Chriſtian
" Faith, and to confute all heretics and ſchiſ-
" matics—upon the divine authority of the
" Holy Scriptures — upon the authority of
" the writings of the primitive Fathers, as
" to the faith and practice of the primitive
" Church — upon the Divinity of our Lord
" and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt — upon the Divi-
" nity of the Holy Ghoſt — upon the Articles
" of the Chriſtian Faith, as comprehended
" in the Apoſtles' and Nicene Creeds.

" Alſo I direct, that thirty copies of the
" eight Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be
" always printed, within two months after
" they are preached, and one copy ſhall be
" given to the Chancellor of the Univerſity,
" and one copy to the Head of every Col-
" lege,

" lege, and one copy to the Mayor of the
" City of Oxford, and one copy to be put
" into the Bodleian Library; and the ex-
" pence of printing them ſhall be paid out
" of the revenue of the Lands or Eſtates
" given for eſtabliſhing the Divinity Lecture
" Sermons; and the Preacher ſhall not be
" paid, nor be entitled to the revenue, before
" they are printed.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that no per-
" ſon ſhall be qualified to preach the Di-
" vinity Lecture Sermons, unleſs he hath
" taken the Degree of Maſter of Arts at
" leaſt, in one of the two Univerſities of
" Oxford or Cambridge; and that the ſame
" perſon ſhall never preach the Divinity
" Lecture Sermons twice."

*The clear income of Mr.* Bampton's *eſtate amounts to about* 120*l.* per ann.

CONTENTS.

# CONTENTS.


## SERMON I.

The Uſe and Abuſe of Reaſon.

LUKE XII. 57.

*Yea, and why even of yourſelves judge ye not what is right?*

## SERMON II.

Objections againſt Inſpiration conſidered.

PSALM CXIX. 130.

*The entrance of thy words giveth light: it giveth underſtanding unto the ſimple.*

## SERMON III.

The Authority of the Ancient Fathers examined.

1 THES. V. 12, 13.

*We beſeech you, brethren, to know them which labour*

*labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admoniſh you. And to eſteem them very highly in love for their works' ſake.*

SERMON IV.

On the Conduct of the firſt Reformers.

PSALM LXXX. 9.

*Thou preparedſt room before it, thou didſt cauſe it to take deep root, and it filled the land.*

SERMON V.

The Charge of Intolerance in the Church of England refuted.

2 COR. I. 24.

*Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.*

SERMON VI.

Objections againſt the Liturgy anſwered.

NUMB. XVI. Part of the 11th Verſe.

*Thou and all thy company are gathered together againſt the Lord.*

SERMON

# CONTENTS.


## SERMON VII.

On the Evils of Separation.

ROM. XVI. 17.

*Now I beſeech you, brethren, mark them which cauſe diviſions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.*

## SERMON VIII.

The Preſent State of Religion, with ſome conjectural Remarks upon Prophecies to be fulfilled hereafter.

1 JOHN III. Part of Verſe 2.

*It doth not yet appear what we ſhall be.*

# SERMON I.

## LUKE XII. 57.

YEA, AND WHY EVEN OF YOURSELVES JUDGE YE NOT WHAT IS RIGHT.

WE may conſider this ſevere remonſtrance of our Saviour as addreſſed to unbelievers of every age, we may conſider it as an urgent call to exerciſe their underſtanding with diligence and impartiality upon all religious ſubjects. No blind deference to authority and eſtabliſhed opinions is required, no fervour of imagination is to be ſubſtituted in the place of cool reflection and ſound judgment. [a] *To prove all things and to hold faſt to that which is good*, to temper zeal with knowledge, to place the will and affections under the guidance of reaſon is the uniform admonition of our divine Maſter and his Apoſtles.

[a] 1 Theſ. v. 21.

How ſevere was the reproof which he adminiſtered to the Jews? [b] *Ye hypocrites, ye can diſcern the face of the ſky, and of the earth,* ye diſcover in the common incidents and events of things ſufficient penetration and diſcernment, how is it that ye cannot uſe the ſame degree of attention in examining the proofs of my divine miſſion?

We live in an age of which credulity is not the leading imperfection. In defence of our religion no pious frauds can be practiſed, no ſpecious arguments will be admitted. And while it is our duty to ſtand forth as thoſe *who have not followed cunningly deviſed fables,* we are ſurrounded by ſo numerous an hoſt of adverſaries, that we muſt be cautious how we put on our ſpiritual armour, and leſt we expoſe to danger the walls of our defenced city. All our vigilance will be ſcarce ſufficient for the conflict. May He, who *teacheth man knowledge, and giveth ſtrength for the battle,* ſupport and aſſiſt us; may he give a bleſſing to the weakeſt and moſt imperfect endeavours, and may zeal and ſincerity compenſate for the weakneſs of our performances.

[b] Luke xii. 56.

The

The general deſign of the diſcourſes to be delivered to this audience is a Vindication of the Church of England againſt the objections of the principal Sects.—And this vindication will begin with an attempt to ſtate the uſe and the abuſe of our own faculties, the true notion of inſpiration with the objections brought againſt it, and the authority of the ancient Fathers.

After which, the natural progreſs of diſquiſition will lead us to inveſtigate the principles of the Reformation and the general conduct of the Reformers.

An enquiry will next be made into the reaſonableneſs of ſeparation from a diſcuſſion of the ſpecifick doctrines which are the ſubject of controverſy between us and our diſſenting brethren.—The whole will be concluded with ſome obſervations upon the preſent ſtate of religion, and ſome conjectural remarks upon prophecies which yet remain to be fulfilled.

The ſubject of the preſent diſcourſe, in conformity to the words of the text, is the uſe and abuſe of reaſon in matters of religion.—

The pride of Philoſophy has too highly exalted reaſon, the mock humility of Enthuſiaſm has debaſed it. Moreover, while the Deiſt from ſelf-ſufficiency has ſpurned the aid and denied the neceſſity of Revelation, the well meaning advocate for Chriſtianity has collected and exaggerated all the inſtances of ignorance and depravity to be found in the heathen world, and enquiries have been often made how much of the heathen morality was borrowed from Revelation, and it has been taken for granted that becauſe ſome of the Greek philoſophers travelled into Egypt, all their knowledge of the Deity and all their precepts reſpecting the private and ſocial duties of man, were brought from thence. Their acquieſcence in the popular religion is alledged as a proof of the groſsneſs of their minds, and they are generally repreſented as not having themſelves, much leſs inculcating in others, any ideas of thoſe ſublimer moral precepts, which, it is contended, are to be found only in the Goſpel. The hiſtory of all kingdoms in a ſtate of barbarity is uncertain, and it muſt be allowed that no one ever emerged from ſuch a ſtate by its own mere effects. But whatever knowledge the philoſophers carried from the Eaſt, they certainly improved upon it—

it—They were not ignorant that purity of intention is neceſſary to conſtitute real goodneſs, that a deſire of revenge is a mean and groveling paſſion, that man is not ſuch a judge of his own happineſs as to know what to requeſt of heaven, and that he is inſufficient of himſelf to become what he was intended to be, without ſupernatural aſſiſtance —Nor are we to impute to Cicero all the ſcepticiſm apparently to be found in his writings. He gives the opinions of every ſect the moſt plauſible appearance, and leaves the reader to judge for himſelf. The greatneſs of mind, which his morality diſplays, will delight an intelligent reader, as it will expoſe the mean and the profligate of every age and every country. Nor need any one be alarmed, if we ſhould in ſome degree think more highly of the ſages of Greece and Rome than we ought to think. Much vanity and pride, much unneceſſary ſubtlety and refinement, much temporary compliance and puſillanimous condeſcenſion, to be found amongſt them, will abundantly juſtify the cenſure of St. Paul, and ſet forth the ſuperior excellence of the Goſpel. Every age has abounded with Deiſts, and the preſent age has not the ſmalleſt number. The Church of Rome, by im-

poſing too many articles of belief, has tempted many to diſbelieve every thing: And every other Communion of Chriſtians which has extended the boundaries of faith beyond the line fixed by Revelation, has indirectly, however unintentionally, added to the number of infidels. After the moſt earneſt endeavours, *our good will be evil ſpoken of*; only let not this be the effect of our own imprudence.

It perhaps was never thoroughly known how much a vigorous underſtanding, joined with unwearied diligence, might effect. In controverſy, it is ſafer to allow too much than too little. For to thoſe, who are favoured with a Revelation, who have not ſhut their eyes againſt the light, it is not of the *greateſt* moment to know preciſely what they could have been or what they could have diſcovered in the days of ignorance and ſuperſtition—

But we may be aſked, whether we intend to deny the exiſtence of natural religion or to depreciate its excellence? St. Paul himſelf has authorized us to ſuppoſe, that independent of revelation, there are certain obligations, both to God and our fellow creatures, which ought, under all circumſtances, to have been

been better underſtood and more univerſally practiſed than they were. [c] *The inviſible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; ſo that they are without excuſe: Becauſe that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their fooliſh heart was darkened.* And again, [d] *When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, theſe having not the law, are a law unto themſelves; which ſhew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conſcience alſo bearing witneſs, and their thoughts the mean while accuſing or elſe excuſing one another.* So little are the inſpired penmen diſpoſed to weaken the juſt pretenſions even of deiſm.

It is a poſition, which ſurely can admit of little doubt, that, if Jeſus Chriſt had not come into the world, firſt to inſtruct us and afterwards to die for us, there would have been certain duties which man ought to have practiſed, and that without an uſeleſs diſquiſition concerning the ſeveral ſources of information, we can diſcriminate between ſuch du-

[c] Rom. i. 20, 21. [d] Ibid. ii. 14, 15.

ties and the additional obligations which Chriſtianity impoſes. When this diſcrimination is made, it is clearly ſeen what is or what ought to be underſtood by natural, and what by revealed religion. We are not now ſpeaking of practice; for in practice [e] *Whatſoever is not of faith, is ſin.* Whatſoever we do, actuated ſolely by motives of common prudence and mere morality, has in it the nature of ſin. But what is united in practice may be diſtinguiſhed in ſpeculation. The ſucceſsful movement of a machine depends upon a proper union and a regular co-operation of all its powers: but this neither prevents nor diſcourages us from analyſing them, and determining how much of each power is neceſſary to render the whole compleat. We, therefore, ſee, by the way, with what propriety our Theological ſtudies are aſſiſted by the previous peruſal of a ſyſtem of Ethicks, for though *our* Ethicks and our Theology may proceed from the ſame ſource, yet in contemplation they are diſtinguiſhed from each other, giving and receiving mutual aid and aſſiſtance. For from whence ariſes the internal evidence of the Chriſtian religion? Does it not ariſe from the ſenſe of right and wrong implanted in the human breaſt?

[e] Rom. xiv. 23.

Is

Is not an appeal made to the monitor within, when we prove that *the commandment is holy and juſt and good?* The *evidence* of thoſe doctrines which reaſon cannot comprehend, is ſubject to reaſon. Miracles were ſubject to the ſenſes. The diſperſion and the fate of the Jews is ſubject to our ſenſes. Hiſtorical proofs are ſubject to reaſon. Nothing, in ſhort, is unknown to us, but what it was impoſſible in this ſtate of weakneſs to comprehend or unneceſſary for our everlaſting ſalvation to be communicated; and the more we exerciſe our underſtandings within thoſe limits which our Creator has preſcribed, the better Chriſtians we ſhall be, unleſs our advancement in knowledge puff us up with pride. Nor indeed is it duly conſidered how much the cultivation of the mind may contribute to enoble our nature, and how much it ought to refine, in the true and genuine ſenſe of refinement, our converſation and our morals. While many allowances ſhould be made for groſs, confuſed and imperfect apprehenſions, for a want of the finer feelings of generoſity and honour, the man of learning is engaged in no ſtudy, which does not place before him gratifications unknown to others employed in bodily labour, in the purſuit of gain or even of warrantable

pleaſure.

pleaſure. And it would be ſtrange indeed if his advancement in knowledge of every kind ſhould not facilitate his progreſs in the way of Godlineſs. He ſees the works of God and the wonders of his love both in the natural and the intellectual world; he receives every moment additional proofs, *how gracious the Lord is.* The only danger will be, leſt he ſhould ſeek *for knowledge too wonderful and excellent and to which he cannot attain.* In this ſtate of weakneſs and imperfection the mental eye has limits which it cannot paſs, and *hardly do we gueſs aright the things that are before us, but the things of God can no man know.*

The abuſes of reaſon come naturally under our conſideration——

The firſt and moſt notorious abuſe is, when men arguing from the divine attributes endeavour to prove that no ſyſtem of things could have been framed with greater communications of good to all the creation. Where was it learnt that the Almighty might not have given angelick excellence to every being under the ſun? He, who hath promiſed, as the reward of our piety, to make us happy to all eternity, could, if it had

pleaſed

pleaſed him, have placed us in that ſtate at the very commencement of our exiſtence. He, who hath made one man to differ from another in intellectual powers, almoſt as much as ſome are diſtinguiſhed from the brutes, could certainly have cauſed that no ſuch difference ſhould exiſt. Even to inanimate matter he could have given life and all the enjoyments of life. He could have cauſed thoſe bleſſings to flow in upon us ſpontaneouſly, which are now the reward of labour, care and foreſight, which are often witheld from us, and which were enjoyed in leſs abundance and with more interruption by thoſe who have gone before us. The argument drawn from variety is inconcluſive and frivolous: for though variety contribute to the gratification of the human mind, and though it cauſe the ſupply of our wants to increaſe our enjoyment, yet we muſt allow that intellectual endowments are the greateſt diſplay of divine goodneſs and wiſdom; and that as the leſs is included in the greater, the formation of a rock or a reptile only exhibits a part of that power which has been more extenſively exerted in the formation of men and angels.

The Philoſopher diſcovers that *thouſand worlds*

*worlds are around him*, but knows not how thoſe worlds are peopled—He ſees in the planetary ſyſtem a general proviſion for inhabitants; but he knows not their mental or corporeal endowments. Shall he therefore with this ſcanty intelligence endeavour to prove by his reaſon that every thing is in its higheſt ſtate of perfection? And if he cannot prove it, the attempt is ſurely vain and preſumptuous, indicating a goodneſs of intention, but a want of judgment, calculated to raiſe doubt and perplexity rather than to remove them. What may be proved to a proper purpoſe is, that creatures in general poſſeſs thoſe faculties and powers, which are ſuitable for the ſphere in which they move. But he cannot tell why one animal ſhould be the prey of another, nor why animals of the ſame ſpecies ſhould have different degrees of excellence. If he do not always remember, that the Creator will not be accountable to man for the different portions of happineſs beſtowed upon different creatures, if he will not be content to wait in ſilent humility, till we ſhall no longer *know in part*, or rather from a part, and a very ſmall part, he will ſubject all our conceptions of an overruling Providence to ſome ridicule which might be averted. The truth

is,

is, God hath created light and he hath created darkneſs in the intellectual as well as in the natural world, and will not ſuffer [f] *the thing formed to ſay to him that formed it, Why haſt thou made me thus?* [g] *It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that ſheweth mercy.* Our own efforts and our own merits are totally out of the queſtion. To one he giveth five talents, to another two, to another one, and though the greateſt truſt be calculated to conſtitute the greateſt worldly happineſs, yet when the whole is gratuitous, the receiver muſt be thankful, without murmuring or repining, without *charging him fooliſhly*, or vindicating him injudiciouſly.

Theſe obſervations, as far as they are well founded, will be of uſe when we read *the origin of evil*, with the induſtrious Commentator's annotations, wherein perhaps every ſolution of every difficulty will not be found altogether ſatisfactory. Our idea of infinity is but a negative one. We are ſoon loſt in the contemplation of thoſe attributes which are exerted through all ſpace, and far beyond the moſt comprehenſive thought.

[f] Rom. ix. 20. [g] Ibid. ix. 17.

Another

Another abuſe of reaſon is, when we endeavour to ſtate on what occaſions and in what degree Providence interferes to controul the affairs of this world. We are only made acquainted with a general care and ſuperintendance, except in ſuch inſtances as Revelation points out. That we ultimately owe every thing to the divine goodneſs, is a doctrine as indiſputable as it is encouraging; and that many events are brought about by an inviſible agency, when all human power was either inſufficient or exerted for a contrary purpoſe, is and has been allowed by every good man as well as by every conſcientious Chriſtian: but of what is inviſible it is needleſs to attempt a ſolution, ſuch a one as can be eſtabliſhed upon no ſolid principles, and which may eventually encourage ſpiritual pride and uncharitableneſs. Our Saviour pointed out inſtances in thoſe who were the objects of Pilate's cruelty, and in thoſe upon whom the tower in Siloam fell. Many more may be found in the darker ages of the Church, many ſtill occur among the ignorant and the unlearned. It is not granted us to diſtinguiſh in the mixed government of this world between puniſhments and chaſtiſements. The credulity of the nation firſt occaſioned thoſe profane appeals to providence, which

which, though not formally prohibited by law, are become obſolete in practice.

Beyond the general hope of aid and protection we are not authorized to aſſimilate ourſelves to the Jewiſh nation. Jehovah was their King, and vouchſafed to inſtruct, to rebuke and chaſtiſe them by his prophets.

* The hiſtorian of certain voyages perplexed himſelf and his readers with a diſquiſition upon a particular providence, to which he was led by a deſire of giving ſatisfaction, where nothing can be found but uncertainty. Suffice it for us to know, that with prudence the moſt adverſe events may be turned to our advantage, and that without it, the moſt proſperous will turn to our detriment.

Another abuſe of reaſon is to be found in contemplating the great work of our redemption. The common method of vindicating the goſpel is to argue *a priori* that as *all men have ſinned and fallen ſhort of the glory of God*, ſo his mercy could not operate till his juſtice was ſatisfied; that an atonement was neceſſary, that a ſpotleſs atonement was neceſſary, that

* Hawkeſowrth's Preface.

no

no one leſs than the incarnate Son of God could become ſuch an atonement, and that his infinite perfections could alone render him an all-ſufficient ſacrifice. But there is nothing in our natural ideas of juſtice, which can lead us to the diſcovery of vicarious puniſhment. If we were allowed to reaſon at all upon the ſubject, we ſhould be apt to conclude, that, if any puniſhment be required for the expiation of offences, ſuch puniſhment would be inflicted upon the offenders themſelves; that all men, like David, would be afflicted with ſome temporal calamity, leſt they ſhould be encouraged in wickedneſs themſelves, or leſt they ſhould *give occaſion to the enemies of the Lord to blaſpheme*. If we can aſſign no ſatisfactory cauſe why the guilty did not ſuffer, much leſs can we explain, why our guilt ſhould be transferred to the innocent. The dignity of the ſufferer will be ſo far from aſſiſting our judgment, that the farther he was removed from the infirmities of humanity, the greater and the more unjuſt his ſuffering will appear. For though, as God, he could not ſuffer, yet his emptying himſelf of his glory, his aſſumption of our fleſh, his ready ſubmiſſion to every indignity that malice and perverſeneſs could offer, muſt affect him in a degree infinitely beyond the common feelings of man.

As

As little can we reaſon concerning the *time* of his appearance. Attempts have been made, whole volumes have been written, to prove that no other time could have been ſo proper. This is far beyond our comprehenſion. We can ſay from analogy that almoſt every other bleſſing is or has been communicated gradually, that religion has had it's infancy in common with individuals and with kingdoms, and that He, who knows our frailty, witholds many of his benefits, that we may learn to value them the more. But how different is this from an endeavour to demonſtrate that an earlier period would have been leſs ſuitable or leſs ſalutary? And indeed who ſhall explain to us why the poor Indian, why the deluded Pagan or Mahometan ſtill remain in darkneſs? It can only be ſaid that their ignorance of other kinds is equal to their ignorance of religion; and that their not having received it is no more an argument againſt it, than againſt a ſuperior civil government, againſt true ſound Philoſophy, againſt every better accommodation of life. Are we preferred becauſe we are better than they? God forbid that we ſhould think ſo. The ſame admonition which was given to the Jews, will be applicable to us. They were reminded that their ſelection was

to no inherent merit in themſelves, but to the free and undeſerved mercy of God. And *St. Paul*, 2 Tim. c. i. v. 9. ſays *that God hath ſaved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpoſe and grace, which was given us by Chriſt Jeſus before the world began, but is now made manifeſt by the appearing of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.* The ſame is true of every advantage, indirectly ſo of ſuch as are the conſequence of our own induſtry. The power was God's, the uſe of it only our own. They who complain that their truſt was not larger, ſhould firſt explain why it was ſo large. They had no ſtronger claim than the meaneſt reptile, than the ſtocks and ſtones. *

* On this very point Arnobius (lib. 2. adverſus Gentes) after having proved that the objection of novelty brought againſt the Chriſtian religion is certainly very ſtrong againſt the Pagan (and by the way only intending the whole as argumentum ad homines) concludes with theſe remarkable words, Quare, homines, abſtinete quæſtionibus vacuis impedire ſpes veſtras: nec, ſi aliter quam vos putatis aliquid ſe habet, veſtris potius opinionibus credere, quam rei debetis auguſtæ. Vigent tempora periculis plena et exitiabiles imminent pænæ; confugiamus ad ſalutarem Deum, nec rationem muneris exigamus oblati. Cum de animarum agitur ſalute, ac de reſpectu noſtri, aliquid et ſine ratione faciendum eſt, ut Epictetum dixiſſe approbat Arrianus. Dubitamus, ambigemus, nec eſſe quod dicitur plenum fidei ſuſpicamur; committamus nos Deo, nec plus apud nos valeat incredulitas noſtra, quam illius nominis et potentiæ magnitudo: ne dum ipſi nobis argumenta conquirimus, quibus eſſe videatur falſum id, quod eſſe nolimus atque abnutemus verum, obrepat dies extremus et inimicæ mortis reperiamur in faucibus.

Revelation

Revelation has taught us that Chriſt is our Mediator and Interceſſor. Amongſt men, an advocate is engaged to ſtate circumſtances either altogether unknown, or not ſufficiently conſidered or viewed in an unfavourable light by thoſe who are appointed to hear and determine. How derogatory is every ſuch idea from the Majeſty of the Creator? He diſcerns at one view whatever may tend to palliate our offences. Yet he has been pleaſed to repreſent himſelf as prevailed upon by importunity and perſeverance; he allowed the Prieſts and the Prophets to offer up ſupplications for the people, he hath commanded us to pray one for another. From analogy we can juſtly urge, that in the mixed diſpenſation of things we perform mutual ſervice; the innocent protect the guilty, the righteous defend the wicked, the valiant die to ſecure thoſe advantages which others muſt enjoy, the wiſe and the upright do more good to their fellow creatures than to themſelves; in ſhort, *one ſoweth and another reapeth.* It will be anſwered perhaps, that this holds good merely in reſpect to temporal advantages. It is true alſo in reſpect to ſpiritual. Our inſtruction in the way of Godlineſs is certainly not our own; the wholeſome admo-

nition of a friend, when he ſees us wander out of the way, is certainly adventitious and frequently fortuitous. Yet, by theſe means, we learn more perfectly and embrace more eagerly the terms of ſalvation. The arguments, therefore, againſt the mediation of Chriſt, as well as againſt the aſſiſtance of the Holy Ghoſt, will in proportion, though infinitely leſs, be inconcluſive againſt the agency and inſtrumentality of our fellow creatures. Why any thing, which is not the effect of our own endeavours, ſhould contribute to our happineſs in another world, is matter of gratitude, not of vain curioſity, our conviction of the fact will be ſufficient to eſtabliſh its propriety. Amidſt diſappointment therefore and ſorrow, amidſt temptation and every kind of wickedneſs, we may rely upon the great Phyſician of our ſouls, who will cure all our maladies, unleſs we counteract his deſigns. We may deceive ourſelves, but he continueth faithful.

It is another abuſe of reaſon to enter into a minute enquiry concerning the nature of the rewards and puniſhments of another world. The general judgment is deſcribed in the moſt awful language of human judicatures; an *account is to be given, the Books are to be opened, and*

*and the Judge ſhall ſeparate the righteous from the wicked. The righteous ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament,* and *the wicked ſhall be conſigned to everlaſting darkneſs and flames.* All theſe deſcriptions, with others which it is not neceſſary to enumerate are intended, through the medium of the ſenſes, to make an impreſſion upon the mind; they ſet forth the impartial juſtice of our Creator and Redeemer, they ſet forth exquiſite happineſs and exquiſite miſery, of which nothing we ſee or know can give us real conceptions. To give locality to the manſions of bliſs and of miſery is ſaid to be unphiloſophical. The reality of their exiſtence is the only eſſential point, which a Chriſtian is bound to believe concerning them. The pains and the pleaſures of the mind, even in this vale of miſery, can only be deſcribed by ſenſible ideas. But who ever contended that ſuch ideas are adequate? How then could it be expected that any language ſhould expreſs the bliſs or the wretchedneſs of thoſe, who ſhall riſe with new faculties and powers, to enjoy the one or to ſuffer the other, to all eternity?

Concerning the intermediate ſtate between death and judgment, it is another abuſe of rea-

ſon to make minute enquiry. All your information, (if ſuch it can be called, where no particular account is given or ſeems intended to be given) is drawn from the promiſe made to the [h] penitent thief, and from the declaration of St. Paul, [i] *That to be with Chriſt was far better for himſelf.* And all the concluſion we can draw is ſimply this; that, after our diſſolution, we ſhall continue to exiſt, and that we may hope for ſome portion of happineſs immediately, [j] *if our converſation have been ſuch as becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt.* But here our curioſity is checked; here have commenced thoſe perplexing, embarraſſing queſtions concerning the ſleep or the intermediate ſtate of the ſoul, and from hence probably firſt ſprung the doctrine of purgatory. To him, who is convinced that *there is no work nor device in the grave, whither he is going*, it is a ſufficient incitement to Religion, that the deſires and inclinations he cultivates in this world will follow him into the next, and *whatſoever he ſoweth that ſhall he alſo reap.*

Another abuſe of reaſon has been to attempt an expoſition of the Doctrine of the

[h] Luke xxiii. [i] Phil. i. [j] Phil. i. 27.

Trinity

Trinity, by compariſons and familiar illuſtrations. Perhaps we ſhall be reminded [k] *of the three that bear witneſs in earth, the ſpirit, the water, and the blood:* as compared with *the three that bear witneſs in heaven.*

Here this ſimilarity is not a ſimilarity of nature, but of certain and concurring evidence. It was the error of the primitive Fathers to imagine that they could render the doctrine intelligible by familiar inſtances, ſuch as rays of light iſſuing from the ſun, and torches lighted, without diminiſhing the ſource. In the darker ages, men proceeded to the groſſeſt degree of ignorance by exhibiting this myſtery in viſible repreſentations. Well might the Almighty have remonſtrated in the language of the prophet. [l] *To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?* Every true friend of religion wiſhes that much leſs had been ſaid, that much leſs reaſoning had been employed, upon the ſubject; that it had been diſcuſſed with humility, and without refinement; much tumult and diſtraction would have been prevented in the early ages of the Church, much altercation would have been prevented in later

[k] 1 John. v. [l] Iſ. xlvi. 5.

times. The attention of men would have been turned more upon the practical than the ſpeculative parts of religion, and by leſs diſputation they would have become more ſeriouſly and truly devout.

The laſt abuſe of reaſon, which it ſeems neceſſary to point out, is in the doctrine of Predeſtination and Election. A future opportunity will be taken to prove, that in the Calviniſtical ſenſe of the words, neither our Saviour nor his Apoſtles inculcated any ſuch thing. In the mean time, if we begin to reaſon, we ſhall never be able to explain, why the Almighty ſhould give exiſtence to any creature, who, He foreſaw, would be miſerable to all eternity, let the cauſe of that miſery be what it may. If we proceed, every ſtep will but the more bewilder us: we ſhall conclude againſt the eternity of future puniſhments, or, with the Poet, we ſhall find out a temporary ſtate of ſuffering, or, with the Romaniſt, have recourſe to a purgatory. Thus we ſhall weaken the force of thoſe threats which preſent to the ſinner *a worm that never dies, and a fire that ſhall never be quenched.* If we imagine ourſelves in the number of the elect, we ſhall preſume; if in the number of the reprobate, we

we ſhall deſpair; *but the Lord is in his holy Temple, beholding the evil and the good, let all the Earth keep ſilence before him.*

Many other abuſes of reaſon might have been enumerated, but having adverted to ſuch as ſeemed moſt fatal to the real intereſt of religion, we ſhall perhaps be the more fully prepared and the more properly armed for its defence; we ſhall in ſome degree have adjuſted the previous conditions and the legitimate mode of contention; we ſhall be cautious how we engage upon untenable ground, with unlawful, inefficient, unwieldy or untractable weapons; we ſhall be ſober minded, cool, collected, we ſhall ſacrifice no ſolid good to ſpecious advantages; and may the Lord of Hoſts himſelf, who ſtilleth the raging of the *ſea, who ſtilleth alſo the madneſs of the people, guide us with his counſel,* and lead us on to conqueſt and unſpeakable glory, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and praiſe now and forevermore.

# SERMON II.

## PSALM CXIX. 130.

THE ENTRANCE OF THY WORDS GIVETH LIGHT: IT GIVETH UNDERSTANDING UNTO THE SIMPLE.

IN all our religious enquiries, it is of the utmoſt moment previouſly to aſcertain the nature and weight of that authority, to which we make our appeal. And as the ſacred writers poſſeſs the greateſt, it is natural to begin with them. The ſubject of inſpiration has been frequently handled; it is intended in the following diſcourſe to anſwer objections as they lie ſcattered in various authors, whether open enemies or pretended friends, to obviate or prevent miſconſtructions and miſtakes. The variety of matter is difficult to be arranged in a particular method and in due regularity.

On

On this occaſion, as on many others, we ſhall find cauſe to reject the argument, *a priori*. For any thing we can prove to the contrary, the Almighty might have withheld part of the information he hath been pleaſed to grant, or he might have added more. Suffice it for us to acknowledge with gratitude that he hath made ample proviſion for all our ſpiritual wants and infirmities, and that his Glory is beſt conſulted when we conſult our own real intereſt and happineſs.

Perhaps no propoſition can be more indiſputable, than that if the ſacred writers aſſumed a character which did not belong to them, if they obtruded upon men their own opinions for divine truths, they muſt be deemed moſt ſhameleſs hypocrites. No plea of policy or temporary expediency could juſtify ſuch a conduct. Solemn invocations and ſolemn appeals to Heaven, declarations of being not only inſtructed *what* to ſpeak, which was frequently the act of God, but of being commanded under the ſevereſt penalties actually to ſpeak, would amount to nothing ſhort of blaſphemy. But the ſacred writers, who diſdain falſe praiſe, who, with a dignity of mind unknown to other writers, record their own failings,

failings, defects and miſcarriages, which they neither attempt to defend nor to palliate, are free from the very ſhadow of ſuch an imputation. And as it was clear from the beginning of the world how liable even miracles themſelves were to be imitated or counterfeited, Moſes eſtabliſhed the certainty of his miſſion by a compleat victory over the magicians.

Various have been the interpretations of the word Prophet and its correſponding terms in other languages. We are at preſent only concerned to examine the pretenſions of thoſe, who were, according to our belief, delegated to inſtruct or reprove the men of their own age, and to foretel what ſhould happen in future periods. Dreadful were the denunciations againſt ſuch as ſhould falſely pretend to a divine commiſſion. * *The Prophet which ſhall preſume a word in my name, which I have commanded him not to ſpeak, or that ſhall ſpeak in the name of other Gods, even that Prophet ſhall die.* Then is ſubjoined the proper teſt of a Prophet. *If thou ſhalt ſay in thine heart, how ſhall we know the word which the Lord hath not ſpoken? When a Prophet ſpeaketh in the name*

* Deut. xviii.

*of*

*of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to paſs, that is the thing which the Lord hath not ſpoken, but the Prophet hath ſpoken it preſumptuouſly; Thou ſhalt not be afraid of him.* The teſt then of the veracity of a Prophet was to depend upon ſomething to be performed or ſome event to be foretold, which ſhould have an immediate accompliſhment. For as the Almighty never afforded to men very large information concerning diſtant times and tranſactions, and as the truth of what was foretold could not be known till its accompliſhment, ſome other proof was required to enforce belief with contemporary people.

Another paſſage in [b] Deuteronomy ſuppoſes a poſſibility of dreaming a dream, or of giving a ſign or a wonder with a bad intention. The nature of the dream, of the ſign or wonder is not explained, and the dreamer or worker of miracles was to be judged of by the tendency of his inſtructions. *If the ſign or the wonder come to paſs, whereof he ſpake unto thee, ſaying, let us go after other Gods, which thou haſt not known, and let us ſerve them. Thou ſhalt not hearken unto the words of that Prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your*

[b] Chap. xiii.

*God*

*God proveth you*, ſuffers this kind of temptation now and then to be placed before you, to know whether ye *love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your ſoul.* The reception of ſuch perſons, therefore, was to depend upon the nature of their inſtructions as well as upon their miracles. Even extraordinary gifts might be perverted to the diſhonour of him, who beſtowed them.

It is a point not ſufficiently attended to, that in the early ages of the world, revelations from heaven were more frequent; and though as much of theſe revelations as will be neceſſary to confirm our faith have come down to us, yet were there many Prophets beſides them whoſe names and whoſe writings are known to us. In this deſcription we need not include the ſons of the Prophets, who ſeem more to have reſembled a body of literary perſons, devoted to the ſtudy of religion and the advancement of piety.

Similar communications ſeem to have been vouchſafed in the early ages of the Chriſtian Church. We ſhall perhaps incur the imputation of credulity, if we believe all the prophecies and all the miracles recorded by the

firſt Eccleſiaſtical hiſtorians. Yet the declarations of St. Paul concerning the gifts of the ſpirit granted to Chriſtians, in various degrees and for various purpoſes, will not allow any reaſonable perſon to doubt that ſuch gifts were granted in great abundance for the confirmation of the truth, and in condeſcenſion to the peculiar wants and infirmities of an Infant Church. And ſo fully and clearly are they diſtinguiſhed from the ordinary gifts and graces, after which all Chriſtians in all ages are commanded to aſpire, that every attempt to explain them away is as unſucceſsful in the execution, as it is dangerous and miſchievous in the intention.

Of the prophetick ſpirit of David many doubts ſeem to be entertained. The paſſages quoted in the New Teſtament from the Pſalms are ſuppoſed to be adduced by miſtake, or by a kind of pious fraud, or a mere compliance with popular prejudice. Let him who is conſcious of a weak cauſe have recourſe to ſuch methods: a conſcientious advocate for Chriſtianity diſdains artifice.

David's claim to the gift of prophecy is not ſo eaſily deſtroyed. There is ſomething truly intereſting

intereſting in his whole hiſtory; his character and his deſtination have been a frequent ſubject of diſcuſſion. It is requiſite for us to enquire whether ſome of his pſalms be not prophetical, becauſe, as many of them as are ſuch will internally prove inſpiration. Were they what our Saviour and his Apoſtles have repreſented them, full of predictions concerning the Meſſiah, we are deſired to explain, why no intimation is given, no exordium to be found, which might become a key to the proper interpretation. This, we are farther reminded, is ſo far from being the caſe, that nothing can be found therein which may not be applied to other circumſtances and events; and for what can be proved to the contrary, Pindar and Horace, who in the Pagan ſenſe of the word, were inſpired, may have as good and indiſputable a claim to inſpiration as David himſelf. The boldneſs of ſcriptural tropes and figures, allegories and ſimilitudes, may be inſiſted upon, as they are now and then to ſerve particular purpoſes, in order to account for ſo much amplification.

With a learned Prelate, whoſe Prelections throw light on every topick which comes under his contemplation, to whom the Cri-

tick and the Divine are equally indebted, we muſt ever acknowledge, that there is great danger leſt diſtance of time and diſadvantage of ſituation ſhould diſable us from ſeeing clearly the ſenſe and the beauties of the * Hebrew poetry, or leſt we ſhould judge of it by our own. Notwithſtanding this difficulty, it will give every true friend of religion real ſatisfaction to find that the legitimate rules of criticiſm will juſtify the conſtruction commonly put upon the numerous pſalms relating to our Saviour; that if preſent incidents are at all alluded to, they are alluded to in expreſſions which have a farther meaning, and that the moſt diſtant event is moſt literally deſcribed. To Iſrael, to Sion, to Jeruſalem throughout the † prophetick writings, are oppoſed in the allegorical as well as in the proper ſenſe, the Aſſyrians, Babylon, Egypt, Idumæa. And if theſe obſervations be juſt, the uſual interpretations of the ſecond, the ſeventy-ſecond, and other pſalms, will no longer be imputed to the reveries of Myſticiſm, but will be eaſy and natural. The faſtidious critick may remind us that convulſions of ſtate are deſcribed under the idea of darkneſs in the Heavens, and a returning chaos; and that all the imagery far

* Bp. Lowth Præl. 5. † Præl. 11.

exceeds

exceeds the boldneſs of weſtern imagery: he may proceed to aſk us, if amplification prevail on ſome occaſions, why not on others? To which we may anſwer, that an obvious diſtinction ſubſiſts between figurative, and ſimple language. In the abovementioned pſalms, we have no tropes nor figures: all is eaſy and unadorned: David and Solomon are, by our own ſuppoſition, no farther figurative characters, than as every illuſtrious anceſtor repreſents an illuſtrious deſcendant, and in whom he himſelf, in common language, is ſaid afterwards to exiſt. Nor is the propriety of ſuch language affected by difference of rank and dignity. It is this very difference that juſtifies our interpretation.

With the great event of Chriſt's manifeſtation ſo many paſſages are connected; there are ſo many promiſes of eſtabliſhing the throne of David from generation to generation, and for ever, that it were as ſuperfluous, as it is endleſs, to recite them. David declares that in the perſon of Chriſt he ſhall riſe again: of himſelf, [c] St. Peter inconteſtably proves, that ſuch a declaration could not be true. *Thou*

[c] Acts ii.

*wilt*

*wilt not leave my ſoul in hell, neither wilt thou ſuffer thy Holy One to ſee corruption.* What a forced conſtruction would it be to apply this to any temporal diſtreſs? How does it appear that David laboured under any at that time? Throughout the whole pſalm he rejoices in his proſperity: the tranſition from preſent to future bleſſings is eaſy and natural; a tranſition to that reſurrection by which Chriſt hath paſſed through the gates of everlaſting life, and hath opened them to us.

The hundred and tenth pſalm is quoted by our Saviour, and ſo little were the Phariſees able to explain the firſt verſe, that from that day forth *none durſt aſk him any more queſtions.* It has been inſinuated that our Lord's intention was rather to perplex, than to inform. This is a mere ſuggeſtion of fancy; nor is there a ſingle expreſſion calculated to countenance ſuch a conſtruction. If we ſhould be referred to the two paſſages, wherein our divine Maſter ſilenced his oppoſers, one relating to the miſſion of St. John the Baptiſt, the other to the payment of tribute, the argumentation in each is ſolid and unanſwerable. If the fear of the people, or the conſciouſneſs of ſecret treachery, either terrified or

ſhamed

ſhamed them into ſilence, let this be no derogation from the dignity of our bleſſed Lord; let it not diminiſh the real importance of his inſtructions. The hundred and tenth pſalm, unleſs applied to the Meſſiah, will be full of real difficulty. *The dew of thy birth is of the womb of the morning* is well explained: * "The "dew of thy offspring will exceed in fecun- "dity the dew of the morning." How beautifully does the pſalmiſt here expreſs the great, the ſpeedy, and yet gentle increaſe of the Meſſiah's kingdom? The worſhip of Chriſt ſeems to be foretold in the former part of the verſe: [d] *In the day of thy power ſhall the people offer thee free-will offerings, with an holy worſhip*, or, thy people ſhall be liberal in the day of thy power in holy honours, borrowing the expreſſion from the Jewiſh oblation. The goſpel diſpenſation alone clearly and inconteſtably proved him an object of worſhip, and additional motives of gratitude render him in a peculiar manner, the Lord our God. David in his laſt moments declared his own faith and ſtrengthened ours. [e] *The Spirit of the Lord ſpake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Iſrael ſaid, the Rock of Iſrael ſpake to me, he that ruleth over man muſt be juſt, ruling in the*

* Præl. 10. [d] V. 3. [e] 2 Sam. xxiii.

*fear of God. And he ſhall be as the light of the morning, when the ſun riſeth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender graſs ſpringing out of the earth by clear ſhining after rain. Although my houſe be not ſo with God, yet he hath made with me an everlaſting covenant, ordered in all things and ſure: for this is all my ſalvation, and all my deſire, although he maketh it not to grow,* that is, although he have not yet cauſed the branch to bud, although this great event, which is the ſure cauſe of joy and thankſgiving to me, be at ſome diſtance.

That the idea of a double meaning in ſome paſſages may not be thought altogether fanciful, we ſhould do well to recollect, that among the Latin poets, who never ſoared into the regions of imagination with the ſublimity of eaſtern poetry, there are many paſſages which have a hidden import beyond the literal meaning. Indirect praiſe, and indirect cenſure, moral and religious inſtruction are frequently conveyed by ſuch methods, more familiar perhaps to contemporaries than to ſucceeding ages, but having ſufficient marks and indications to be underſtood by the intelligent and attentive. And when it is remembered, that no prophecies were intended to be delivered with

with the fullneſs of hiſtorical evidence, we ſhall perhaps be the leſs ſurprized that the real meaning requires very careful inveſtigation.

Juſtin Martyr ſaw clearly that the ſeventy-ſecond pſalm could not with propriety be applied to Solomon, whoſe melancholy apoſtaſy he expoſes. He likewiſe applies the twenty-fourth, the forty-fifth, and the ninety-eighth pſalms to the Meſſiah, without offering the leaſt violence to any of them.

The Song of Solomon alſo, upon the principles of juſt criticiſm, may be ſuppoſed to deſcribe the union between Chriſt and his Church. As marriage is the moſt ſacred union among men, ſo the writers of the Old Teſtament uſe it figuratively concerning the Jewiſh Church, and St. Paul transfers it to the Chriſtian. Hence likewiſe, Idolatry, to excite the greateſt abhorrence, is called adultery. Solomon therefore will be ranked amongſt the Prophets, and, as far as he was a Prophet, muſt confeſſedly have been inſpired.

Whether, as hath been inſinuated, great wiſdom joined with long experience could have produced a collection of uſeful precepts

and maxims, equal to that which is found in the book of Proverbs and Eccleſiaſtes, is a point which opinion alone cannot determine. The full proof muſt be derived from ſcripture. And yet, by the way, let them give us one inſtance of any one perſon, however celebrated for wiſdom, who has communicated to mankind ſentiments unmixed with error, and free from every mark of human infirmity. Nor is this meant of the darker ages only, or of the ages of heatheniſm, and ſuperſtition. It is meant of the moſt enlightened; it is applicable to many Chriſtians. In Solomon we ſee no love of novelty, no love of ſingularity ſeducing him from the direct path of true wiſdom and ſound judgment. We ſee no attempt to dazzle or to aſtoniſh; no adventious, no gaudy decorations of language. Every admonition, and every maxim finds a ready way to the heart, and will bear the teſt of the ſtricteſt examination; which examination, inſtead of pointing out defects, will preſent new beauties, will command increaſing and ſolid praiſe.

When the inſpiration of the ſacred writers is once deemed partial, it is eaſy to elude the force of any portion, or paſſage, which

which a fanciful critick may deem abſurd or ill founded. Thus the whole ſtory of the Fall of Man may paſs for one of thoſe fables, with which the hiſtory of remote times generally commences. To ſtrengthen ſuch an opinion, it is added, that the ſerpent's eating duſt is now known to be a vulgar error. But a very little attention will convince us, that Moſes, not intending to give a natural hiſtory, hereby points out a ſtate of the moſt abject humiliation. Beſides the figurative meaning of the whole ſentence paſſed upon the ſerpent, he was to remain, in his appearance, in his mode of ſubſiſtence, and his hoſtility to man, a perpetual monument of the baſeneſs of ſeducing others to ſin. Man, and Woman, Heaven, and Earth, were all deſtined to carry the melancholy but ſtriking proofs of the fatality of the firſt tranſgreſſion. In this firſt great change, man was reminded for the future, that, in proportion as he abuſed the powers, and the bleſſings, with which he ſhould be entruſted, they would be gradually withdrawn, or diminiſhed. The ſimilarity of the golden age of the poets, to the time of man's innocence, only proves that the heathen fables were many of them borrowed from the records of truth.

To ſeparate the ſubſtantial from the imaginary evidence of types and figures, it ſeems requiſite to acknowledge, that Joſeph is by no legitimate rule of interpretation a type of Chriſt. He is recorded as an example of filial and fraternal affection, of prudence, integrity, patience and forgiveneſs, of unjuſt reproach crowned with merited honour; as an inſtrument in the hand of the Almighty for the preſervation of a whole kingdom, even of thoſe who had ſought his life. It is eaſy to trace out inſtances of reſemblance between him and our bleſſed Saviour: ſimilar occaſions call for the exerciſe of ſimilar virtues. But no terms are uſed above the account of the real fact, no additional colouring is brought forward, by which we may be led from the contemplation of what is nearer, to the contemplation of ſomething more remote. How different is the hiſtory of Sarah and Hagar? The whole tranſaction was intended to prefigure, firſt, the calling of the Iſraelites, and the excluſion of the Gentiles from the Jewiſh diſpenſation; and afterwards, when in compariſon of the Chriſtian Church, the Jewiſh eſtabliſhment is a ſtate of bondage, Hagar anſwers to Jeruſalem, and the Chriſtians are the genuine offſpring of Sarah. Thus what might

might have appeared an inſtance of unparalleled cruelty and injuſtice in the Father of the Faithful, is found to be fertile with inſtruction, both under the Moſaic and the Goſpel Covenant. [f] After a temporary diſtreſs, Hagar is received under the protection of Providence. Her ſon, after marrying a wife from Egypt, the common emblem of heatheniſm and barbarity, becomes the father of a great nation.

The meaneſt capacity may find, in the hiſtory of the Iſraelites, a pointed analogy to the Chriſtian diſpenſation. Their ſojourning in Egypt, their being allowed to make to themſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, their journey through the wilderneſs, their tabernacle, their prieſthood, their polity, their religious rites and ceremonies, have a ſolid foundation in the morality and doctrines of Chriſtianity. Of the morality they were put in immediate poſſeſſion, though they corrupted it, but the doctrines were only revealed in part, *'till the Sun of righteouſneſs aroſe, with healing in his wings*, to remedy all the corruptions both of faith and practice. Let any impartial diſpaſſionate en-

[f] Gen. xxi.

quirer

quirer take a view of the argument collectively. Let him contemplate a people riſing from ſmall beginnings, whoſe anceſtor *againſt hope believed in hope*; let him view them increaſing and flouriſhing in defiance of oppoſition; let him conſider them as continually trained up and prepared for that great event, which, however beneficial to the reſt of mankind, was to be their peculiar glory, was to reflect luſtre on that which had been obſcure from the perverſeneſs of man, and was to bring honour to thoſe inſtitutions, which had been looked upon by the world at large with contempt and diſdain; he will ſoon diſcover, that the legiſlator of Iſrael muſt have been totally unequal to ſuch a taſk, by the mere exertion of his own powers. Much leſs would ſuch exertion have enabled him to foretel what ſhould come to paſs in diſtant times. Were his hiſtory a compilation of unintereſting tranſactions, merely calculated for amuſement, we might ſuppoſe him, like other hiſtorians, left to tradition, conjecture, or imperfect records. But the Chriſtan ſcheme begins with the firſt traſgreſſion. The reſurrection of the body is exemplified by the aſſumption of Enoch into Heaven. The devaſtation of the flood, the confuſion of tongues,

the

the deſtruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, are melancholy memorials of human wickedneſs. Moſes was learned in all the wiſdom of the Egyptians, had as much human knowledge as the world then afforded, and entered upon his important charge with diffidence and reluctance. Leaving, for a moment, the aid of inſpiration out of the account, we may ſuppoſe his credulity was leſs, in proportion as his learning was greater; and that he was in ſomewhat higher probability of obtaining an authentick account of the Fall of Man, than thoſe who live above three thouſand years later.

The conſeqences of it are as reconcileable with the juſtice of God, as any other hereditary calamities; calamities, which however grievous, hold out perpetual motives to temperance, to induſtry, to integrity; that poſterity may not ſuffer from our miſconduct; that our example may not propagate vice to remote generations. And are not all thoſe countries, in which Chriſt, though once preached, has long ceaſed to be known, melancholy proofs, that in ſpiritual, as well as in temporal advantages, the folly and the obſtinacy of an anceſtor ſhall extend their fatal effects to his deſcendants? The minute enquiries concerning original ſin, it is abſurd to defend: Scripture only warrants

rants us to maintain an innate and an inherent corruption.

The writings of infidels are replete with objections againſt the hiſtory of the Jews. Their injuſtice to the Egyptians, their extirpation of the people, whoſe lands they were deſtined to poſſeſs, their various rebellions againſt the Almighty, are all brought forward to arraign the divine diſpenſations. Were their hiſtory calculated in reality to inculcate improper notions of God's juſtice, its authenticity would be diſputable, its utility would vaniſh; inſtead of inſtructing it would miſlead; and all ſucceeding conquerors might juſtify every degree of cruelty, under the ſanction of this commiſſion, to the Iſraelites. The Lord of the Univerſe can give what power he pleaſes over the lives and the property of his creatures. The ſpoiling of the Egyptians was a puniſhment inflicted by the hands and for the benefit of the people, whom they had oppreſſed, and by whoſe labour they had accumulated great riches. The extirpation of the Canaanites was the puniſhment of invincible wickedneſs, in inflicting which the conquerors were taught, not to delight in blood, not to value themſelves on any imagined

imagined ſuperiority of goodneſs, but to weigh well the conſequences of univerſal depravity. If ambition, if avarice, if cruelty have perverted this part of the hiſtory to bad purpoſes, an account of ſuch perverſion will one day be required.

With equal abſurdity, and with equal deſire to diſparage the authority of holy writ, particular examples, recommended to our imitation, have been the ſubject of cavil or invective. [g] *Be ye followers of me, as I am of Chriſt*, ſays the Apoſtle. We are to imitate them as far as they are worthy of imitation. The man after God's own heart was puniſhed for his complicated crime, [h] *leſt the enemies of the Lord ſhould blaſpheme*; leſt they ſhould draw improper concluſions in favour of ſin, or in accuſation of Providence. But ſuppoſe no ſuch puniſhment had been inflicted, or the hiſtorian had been ſilent. Could any Iſraelite, much more could any Chriſtian have doubted? Is the impoſture of Rebecca and Jacob leſs flagrant, becauſe the ſimple fact is recorded? A very ſlight attention to the ſucceeding part of Jacob's hiſtory will convince us, that he himſelf was harraſſed by fraud and chicanery

[g] 1 Cor. xi. 1. [h] 2 Sam. xii.

under

under Laban, and that he underwent long and dreadful apprehenſions from the reſentment of a brother, whom he had twice ſupplanted. When principles of morality are clearly aſcertained, it is eaſy to draw the moral, without the aſſiſtance of the hiſtorian. Upon many occaſions, a reader does not wiſh that his judgment ſhould either be doubted or anticipated.

It is a dangerous doctrine, which ſome of our former friends have advanced, that, though ſcripture in general may be inſpired, yet there are ſome paſſages in which the ſacred writers have been left to themſelves, have given way to ignorance and infirmity, and have uttered ſomething abſurd and unchriſtian. The imprecations of the pſalms are the firſt and moſt obvious inſtances. Theſe have been proved upon the beſt authority to be predictions only. And if any, concurring with our tranſlators, will not or cannot be convinced of this, let them conſider, that a prophet may be authorized in his public character, to denounce or to pray for, thoſe divine judgments, which, in a private capacity, no human being ought to wiſh for. The kind and forgiving temper of David, when left to the

the operation of his own mind, is ſufficiently exemplified throughout his whole hiſtory.

The curſes of Job amount to nothing more than emphatical and energetick complaint under misfortunes; they, who are advocates for the reality of Job's exiſtence, acknowledge that the book itſelf is dramatical, wherein the hero is repreſented not as a Stoick, but with all the feelings of man, ſtill retaining his integrity, and ſtedfaſt in his hope.

Elijah prayed that God would take away his life. He conſidered it as a felicity to be delivered from a crooked and perverſe generation; he ſuppoſed that his power of doing good had ceaſed; he wiſhed to ſink into oblivion with his fathers, as he did not think himſelf better than they were. Such prayers, however expreſſed, are conditional; the prophet was ſtill reſigned to his will, *in whoſe hands are the iſſues of life and death.*

The concluſion of the twentieth chapter of Jeremiah has the moſt objectionable aſpect. If we conſider it as a real imprecation, or as a prediction, we cannot give a very rational ac-

count of it; as a ſpecimen of poetical imagery and exaggeration, it can alone be reconciled with our juſt notions of inſpiration. The calamities mentioned are temporal, and the ſuppoſed object probably did not exiſt; in fact, he ſeems an imaginary character, brought forward to heighten the melancholy deſcription.

Having examined ſome of the material objections againſt inſpiration, let us now ſee what the inſpired writers teſtify of themſelves. The well known paſſage in 2 Tim. c. iii. v. 16. informs us, that *all ſcripture is given by inſpiration of God.* This is plain, full, and ſatisfactory. No various reading is offered to elude the force of the aſſertion. It muſt be concluſive concerning books then extant. If it be ſaid, that St. Paul did not include his own epiſtles, we have other proofs for the inſpiration of them. The following paſſages will prove the point: *He therefore that deſpiſeth, deſpiſeth not man, but God, who hath alſo given unto us his holy ſpirit. Ye know what commandment we gave you by the Lord Jeſus. For this cauſe alſo thank we God without ceaſing, becauſe when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word*

*word of man, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh alſo in you that believe. Our goſpel came not unto you in word only, but alſo in power, and in the Holy Ghoſt, and in much aſſurance,* or, as it may be rendered, *with* power, and *with* the Holy Ghoſt, and with full evidence, the truth of it being confirmed by every proof that truth can have.—*We have received not the ſpirit of the world, but the ſpirit which is of God, that we might know the things which are freely given us of God. Which things alſo we ſpeak, not in the words which man's wiſdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghoſt teacheth, comparing ſpiritual things with ſpiritual. I certify you, brethren, that the Goſpel, which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jeſus Chriſt.* Nor do the ſolemn appeals made to the Almighty for the truth of what he ſays, at all invalidate this idea of inſpiration. They are intended to make a ſtronger and a more laſting impreſſion. The Almighty is ſaid in ſcripture to ſwear by himſelf. Is this neceſſary to the performance of his promiſes, or to the certainty of his declarations? It is a condeſcenſion to human infirmity, and a compliance with human cuſtoms: it is a momen-

tous admonition of his juſtice, faithfulneſs and truth. Similar to which is the deſign of adminiſtering oaths one to another. The witneſs of our thoughts, words and actions, is always preſent with us, and care is taken that he may not be abſent from our remembrance.

There were indeed particular caſes of temporary convenience or expediency, in which the apoſtle gives his own advice and opinion, without that plenary authority from God, which was confined to matters of greater importance. The caſes themſelves ſufficiently explain the reaſon of this, and may teach Chriſtians in general not to confound ſubordinate duties with ſuch as are binding in all ages, and under all circumſtances. Of the degree of conviction, with which St. Paul delivers his ſentiments on theſe ſubjects, it is not neceſſary to decide with preciſion. He ſpeaks *as one who had obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful*, as one who conceives that he ſhould be extremely ungrateful to the biſhop of our ſouls, if he did not always conſult the true intereſt of the Church. See 1 Cor. vii. 2 Cor. viii.

But ſhould we for a moment ſuppoſe that St. Paul and the other Apoſtles did not ſpeak by

by the immediate guidance of the Spirit, it will not therefore follow, that their opinions, as mere men, ſhould be leſs concluſive than the opinions of ſuch as call them in queſtion. The Apoſtle of the Gentiles had a vigorous and comprehenſive mind: he was acquainted with all the comments and all the refinements upon the law: he was converſant with the Grecian poets and with the Grecian cuſtoms; he underſtood their philoſophy. He was not liable to the charge of credulity, for his prejudices had turned the contrary way. Under ſuch circumſtances a ſober minded critick would not haſtily charge him with error and ſophiſtry, with a miſconſtruction of prophecies, or an improper application of them. Much leſs would he ſuppoſe that an epiſtle, which is to be conſidered as the model of our argumentation with the Jews, ſhould be ſo figurative as to have types without antitypes, ſhadows without correſponding ſubſtance, mentioning ſacrifices without any ſolid meaning, but to beguile rooted prepoſſeſſion into compliance, and reducing the Saviour of the world to the quality of a mere martyr and a mere man. But what miſerable ſubterfuges will not ſome have recourſe to, when a paſſage, quoted in the firſt chapter from the

hundred and ſecond pſalm, aſſerting the divinity of Chriſt, and the creation of the world by him, ſhall be placed in a parentheſis or be deemed a digreſſion.

Of the prophecies and expreſſions quoted from the Old Teſtament in the New, ſome are adduced in direct proof, ſome by way of accommodation. Yet perhaps this accommodation is leſs frequent than is generally ſuppoſed. It is doubted by an eminent and a very diffident critick, whether the ſecond pſalm has any reference at all to David.* And it may alſo be doubted, whether the prophecy applied to the children in Bethlehem, and that applied to Judas in the acts, were not deſigned to foretel each of thoſe horrid crimes.

The induſtry of the learned has proved to us that paſſages are quoted in ſubſtance, but not always in words,† that they are quoted from the tranſlation of the Septuagint, and that every attempt to ſettle an exact agreement muſt be unſucceſsful, for no collation of MSS will bring about what never ſubſiſted nor was

* See Merrick on the Pſalms.

† See Dr. Randolph's preface to his edition of paſſages quoted from the Old Teſtament in the New.

ever

ever intended. Little minds will cavil at little variations, acting in literature as in common life, attending to minuter circumſtances and relinquiſhing ſolid advantages. Verbal criticiſm, confined within due bounds, has many ſingular uſes; but no part of human knowledge has betrayed men into greater ſubtleties and more unneceſſary refinements.

To diſcuſs the whole ſubject of inſpiration, to point out the ſcrupulous exactneſs with which all the ſacred books have been examined, preſerved and tranſmitted to ſucceeding ages, and to ſtate the collateral teſtimonies which prove them genuine, is altogether ſuperfluous. If what hath been ſaid may tend to vindicate the authority we attribute to them and to increaſe the veneration with which we conſult them, ſome hope may yet be entertained that theſe oracles of truth will guide us in the way of Salvation. The errors of tranſcribers have not affected one article of faith. Even ſuch as ſubſiſt will be gradually leſſened by learning and ingenuity, as long as a proper medium is obſerved between licentious criticiſm and ſupine acquieſcence. A new verſion given to the people would be attended with ſome inconveniences, and the

diſcretion of their paſtors will clear up obſcurities and ſolve difficulties as far as is eſſential to the purity of their converſation and the tranquillity of their minds. To fix the limits of their curioſity, to extricate them from the labyrinth to which enthuſiaſm or miſguided reaſon may have led them, will be an uſeful and a pleaſing employment. *Thus they will become wiſer than the aged, thus they will know of the doctrines whether they be of God.*

We ſhould all remember that the ſacred writers do not deliver a ſyſtem of philoſophy, that the tranſactions they record are not always reducible to ſtrict chronology; that the importance more than the regular order of events is regarded; that where exact method was never intended, tranſpoſitions or interpolations will be out of the queſtion; that the language is conformable to the manners of the times and the condition of the ſeveral penmen; that they were no farther aſſiſted than to preſerve them from material miſtakes; that the influence of the Holy Spirit did not ſuperſede the uſe of their natural powers, and that collateral proofs of their veracity have been and may be brought from natural and moral philoſophy, from hiſtory, from travels, and from every

circumſtance

circumſtance of man. Such is the condeſcenſion ſhewn to the prejudices of unbelievers, ſuch is the care taken to remove the charge of credulity from believers. Our gratitude to the Author and finiſher of our faith will increaſe with faith itſelf, and every moment ſpent in religious meditation will convince us more and more, *That his words are ſweet unto the taſte, yea, ſweeter than honey unto the mouth.*

# SERMON III.

---

1 THES. V. 12, 13.

WE BESEECH YOU, BRETHREN, TO KNOW THEM WHICH LABOUR AMONG YOU, AND ARE OVER YOU IN THE LORD, AND ADMONISH YOU. AND TO ESTEEM THEM VERY HIGHLY IN LOVE FOR THEIR WORKS' SAKE.

FROM the inſpired writers our attention is naturally turned to the labours of thoſe, who, immediately after the days of the Apoſtles, became preachers of the Goſpel, and ſome of whom ſealed the truth of it with their blood. * The Author of *The Antiquities of the Chriſtian Church* has with great diligence and fidelity vindicated the Church of England in moſt of her doctrines, and in

* Bingham.

her

her diſcipline, from the practice of the primitive churches. And indeed every ſober and diſpaſſionate enquirer will deem this no ſmall or inconſiderable proof of the excellence of our cauſe; notwithſtanding all the melancholy inſtances of human depravity and perverſeneſs; notwithſtanding all the predictions of hereſy and ſchiſm, and the accompliſhment of ſuch predictions, he will ſuſpect at leaſt that the writings of the Fathers have ſome veſtiges of genuine orthodoxy, and that near the fountain, the ſtream could not be totally corrupted.

The misfortune is, while ſome have paid to them implicit deference, others have treated them with indecent contempt, or unmerited neglect. While ſome have interpreted them in favour of Popery, others (thinking that they could not be hoſtile to Popery without being hoſtile to them) have taken a malignant pleaſure in expoſing and exaggerating errors and defects. A third claſs of men, with a ſtill more miſchievous purpoſe, have attacked the Chriſtian Religion under the ſpecious pretence of refuting them. Many of our own communion are induced to believe, that they are full of notorious imperfections,

fections, that they are fanatical and myſtical in almoſt all their interpretations of ſcripture, and that however unqueſtionable their integrity and their piety may have been, their judgement is ever to be diſputed.

It is intended to offer ſome general obſervations concerning thoſe, who flouriſhed for the three firſt centuries, and part of the fourth.

And here one cannot but previouſly expreſs a wiſh that faſtidious criticks would make as many allowances for their ſtyle and manner, as they do for the ſtyle and manner of profane authors. Do not ſome amongſt the latter affect an antiquated manner of writing? Do not others affect low conceit and quaint antitheſis, full of ſuperſtition or Patavinity, tediouſly prolix, or affectedly conciſe? Is the harſhneſs of Plutarch's language deemed any objection, when placed in the balance with the excellent inſtruction he conveys upon almoſt every ſubject? *Will not Wiſdom ever be juſtified of all her children*, even though her outward garb be deſtitute of elegance and ſplendour?

But

But whoever peruſes the Primitive Fathers impartially, will find them by no means deſtitute of eloquence or energy. Some of them imitate ſucceſsfully the ſtyle and language of the Apoſtles; and true zeal is known to ſuggeſt forcible ideas and forcible language even to men devoid of rhetorical ornament.

The morality and religious precepts of all ages and all countries muſt be conſidered by ſucceeding times as containing matter of admonition rather than of information. But are poets and philoſophers undervalued for well known and reiterated exhortations to the performance of the publick, the private, and the ſocial duties of man? Is not every allowance made for purity of intentions; and is not the very deſire of novelty frequently relinquiſhed for the improvement of the heart? Ignorance continually ſtands in need of inſtruction, and wavering virtue continually calls for aid or encouragement. The well known topicks of righteouſneſs, temperance, and a judgment to come, may rouze the lethargick ſinner, and however well known in theory, may be new in practice. The univerſal depravity of mankind fully juſtified the

the firſt preachers of Chriſtianity in uſing every method to reclaim a degenerate world.

We ſhall, moreover, be as unjuſt to ourſelves as we ſhould be ungrateful to the Primitive Fathers, if we did not endeavour to receive from them all the aſſiſtance they are capable of affording. Notwithſtanding the diſtance of our days from theirs, we have many ſimilar errors to encounter, and perhaps can add much leſs than is generally imagined to the armour of which they have put us in poſſeſſion.

In the following review of their conduct, it may not be improper to obſerve,

Firſt, their mode of contention with the Jews:

Secondly, their mode of contention with the Gentiles:

Thirdly, their mode of contention with Hereticks.

And firſt, let us obſerve their mode of contention with the Jews. Here their attachment

tachment to myſtery and allegory ſhews itſelf, but not ſo reprehenſibly as ſome have imagined. We have had occaſion elſewhere to obſerve, how much of the Jewiſh hiſtory is typical of the Chriſtian Church. The arguments for the pre-exiſtence of Chriſt, drawn from the Old Teſtament, are ſtrongly inſiſted on. He is affirmed to have created the world; to have appeared unto Abraham, and Jacob; to have conducted the Children of Iſrael through the Wilderneſs, and from thence he is proved to have been an object of worſhip to them, as well as to Chriſtians. Perhaps too much ſtreſs is laid upon the expreſſion, [a] *Let US make man in our image.* The plural is frequently applied to One only, and the language of conſultation is evidently uſed in condeſcenſion to human infirmity. With the ſame kind of condeſcenſion we are told in the eighteenth chapter of the book of Geneſis, ver. 20, 21. that *the Lord ſaid, becauſe the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and becauſe their ſin is very grievous, I will go down now, and ſee whether they have done according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.* It were dangerous to reſt an article of faith upon that, which may be

[a] Gen. i. 26.

only

only a mere idiom. Juſtin Martyr's dialogue with Trypho comprehends all the ſubject of controverſy between Jews and Chriſtians.

In the Epiſtle of Barnabas, proved to be authentick by the teſtimony of Clemens Alexandrinus, there are doubtleſs ſome exceptionable paſſages, particularly that reſpecting the three hundred and eighteen ſouls with Abraham. * The Biographer of the Fathers, though he beſtow juſt praiſe upon the practical and concluding part of it, ſeems to repreſent the former part as full of improbable interpretations. That particular animals, however, ſhould be emblematical of particular vices, and by an eaſy tranſition, of ſuch as are tainted with thoſe vices, is no abſurd ſuppoſition. Blood was forbidden to Noah and his poſterity, to enforce the duty of humanity, becauſe beaſts of prey are diſtinguiſhed by their thirſt after blood. The practice of characterizing human virtues, vices, and paſſions by various animals was very early, and very familiar. Upon this principle, armorial bearings were firſt invented, and ſome of the tribes of Iſrael carried upon their ſtandard ſuch figures as were ſuggeſted in

* Dr. Cave.

Jacob's prophetick deſcription. A proper attention to this kind of imagery will greatly aſſiſt us in interpreting the figurative language of the old Prophets, and of the Revelations of St. John. When the efficacy of the Goſpel in ſubduing the ferocious paſſions is foretold, we are informed, that [b] *the wolf ſhall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard ſhall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child ſhall lead them. And the cow and the bear ſhall feed; their young ones ſhall lie down together; and the lion ſhall eat ſtraw like the ox. And the ſucking child ſhall play on the hole of the aſp, and the weaned child ſhall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They ſhall not hurt nor deſtroy in all my holy mountain.* Clemens Alexandrinus, in his account of the Egyptian methods of inſtruction, has adverted in particular to the ſymbolick and emblematick. 'Tis true that the Pythagoreans uſed ſymbols underſtood by the initiated alone. Yet does it not follow from hence that this mode of inſtitution was not in general familiar. Nor could any thing but diſuſe render it otherwiſe. It was invented in dark and ignorant ages, and well underſtood even before the uſe

[b] Iſa. xi. 6—9.

of

of letters. The Philologiſt, the Poet and the Philoſopher have acknowledged its advantages, have improved upon it, and have made it ſubſervient to the purpoſes of criticiſm, amuſement and information. The fig tree withers away to denote the barrenneſs of the Goſpel among the Jews; the devils enter into the ſwine, and drive them headlong to deſtruction, in token that the Enemy of Souls will bring the carnal and the ſenſual to ruin. From theſe conſiderations it is apprehended that St. Barnabas's doctrine concerning forbidden meats is upon the whole very juſtifiable; he ſuppoſes the creatures prohibited to be emblematical of particular vices, of which the Iſraelites were to entertain the utmoſt abhorrence, ſo as not even to aſſociate with ſuch as were guilty of them.

The Primitive Fathers have fairly and fully ſtated the evidence drawn from prophecy from the days of Adam to the days of Malachi. The truth of our Saviour's predictions is fully proved from Joſephus. Where the general tenour of argumentation is juſt, particular overſights ſhould be pardoned, and the hiſtory of the tranſlation of the Septuagint, given by ſome of them, though not al-

together credible, may have taken its riſe from a pious fraud in the tranſlators. What age has not produced its popular falſehoods, which, after gaining credit for a conſiderable time, have at laſt been refuted by ſucceeding enquirers?

The mode of defence againſt the Heathens comes next under our conſideration. And here one cannot but wonder that the Fathers are ſo often charged with a want of learning. They were converſant in hiſtory both real and fabulous; they inveſtigated the origin of gods and goddeſſes; they quoted poets and philoſophers; they knew whatever was plauſible, and they were able to expoſe whatever was impious and indecent in the Pagan religion. Sometimes they ridiculed, ſometimes they inveighed againſt the various corruptions, which could neither be denied, nor explained away, nor palliated. This ſeverity, notwithſtanding the inſinuations of the celebrated Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, with whom in many inſtances elegance and ſhew ſeem to compenſate for ſophiſtry and deception, was juſtifiable from the conſtant abhorrence of idolatry and ſuperſtition expreſſed in the ſacred writings. If

ſplendour

ſplendour and magnificence have ſo natural a tendency to deceive the moſt intelligent, admonition muſt be frequent and powerful in proportion to the danger. Athenagoras, therefore, Tertullian, Lactantius, and others, are well ſupported by the authority of the Prophets and Apoſtles. How could [c] St. Paul and St. Barnabas more forcibly expreſs their deteſtation and their ſorrow to the Lycaonians, who would have done ſacrifice to them, than by rending their cloaths, and aſſuring them that they were guilty of that very folly, which it was a primary purpoſe of Chriſtianity to prevent? The hiſtory of Pagan ſuperſtition conſtituted much of the knowledge of all the ancients; it required very laborious inveſtigation, it entered into every part of their government, it was the origin of moſt of their productions in the fine arts, which created ſo much admiration in ſucceeding ages, and upon which modern ingenuity has made but little improvement.

Except a critical acquaintance with the original language of the Old Teſtament, and even this exception is not applicable to all, the ancient Fathers had moſt of the learning

[c] Acts xiv.

of which the world was in poſſeſſion, and they were ſo well acquainted with the opinions of philoſophers, that they are charged with incorporating Philoſophy and Chriſtianity together, and are ſaid to have derived the doctrine of a Trinity from the writings of Plato.

Tertullian, in his Exhortation to Patience, ſelects the examples of Lucretia, Mutius, and others, from Heathen Story. Clemens Alexandrinus was not only learned himſelf, but exhorted others to a love of learning. * "As "in Agriculture," ſays he, "and in medicine "he is well taught, who is engaged in va- "rious branches of knowledge, that he may "the better be enabled to manage huſbandry, "and to practice pharmacy; ſo alſo he is well "taught, who brings forward every thing to "the truth, ſo that ſelecting what is uſeful "from geometry, muſick (perhaps the term "comprehends the fine arts) grammar and "philoſophy, he can preſerve the truth from "inſidious attacks."

And a little after, when he had mentioned the opinion of ſome men that the Greek phi-

* Strom. lib. i. c. 9.

loſophy

loſophy came from Satan, he ſubjoins the following obſervation. "If the Greek philo-
"ſophy do not comprehend the greatneſs of
"the Faith, and moreover be weak in
"performing the commandments of the
"Lord, yet it prepares the way before hand
"for kingly inſtruction, and firſt forming the
"diſpoſition, qualifies him, who believes a
"Providence, for the reception of the truth."
His well known argumentation upon the variety of opinions in the Chriſtian Church is particularly nervous; irreſiſtible by unbelievers of any age or any complexion, and in the concluſion of his Στρωματεῖς he has laid down the principles of juſt reaſoning in a very clear and conciſe manner. Where ſuch principles prevail, fanaticiſm cannot enter.

The Fathers are often charged with credulity. This, in the mouth of ſome men, is a relative term, and rather implies a want of faith in themſelves than an exceſs of it in others. The teſtimony of a friend will often be too candid, but the teſtimony of an enemy is equally remarkable for want of candour; envy, indignation, or contempt will invent and propagate any thing to the diſadvantage of others. The darker ages multiplied mira-

cles, and recorded lying wonders. But will it therefore follow that real miracles were never performed? Muſt every thing be falſe, becauſe there is ſome error? An unprejudiced reader will find as much oratory and elegance, as much uſeful and ſubſtantial information, in the writings of the Fathers as in thoſe of Ammianus Marcellinus.

Euſebius tells us in the fifth book of his Hiſtory, that the Gentiles acknowledged the fact of Aurelius's army being furniſhed with water, and of the diſmay and diſperſion of his enemies by thunder and lightning, and the viſion of the Croſs, with *hoc ſigno vinces*, was related to the Hiſtorian by Conſtantine himſelf. If the adverſaries of our Religion could diſprove the *miraculous* diſappointment of Julian in attempting to rebuild the Temple of Jeruſalem, they might weaken the credibility of Hiſtorians, but the truth of the Prophecy remains unſhaken to the preſent hour.

Nothing more effectually prevents credulity than a free and extenſive communication among men of knowledge and integrity, and that this communication ſubſiſted in the early ages of the Chriſtian Church, though deſtitute of

of many diſcoveries, which in our times have facilitated human intercourſe, is proved by variety of evidence. * Irenæus, after having given an abſtract of the Chriſtian Faith, adds this pleaſing account. "This preaching and "this faith are received and faithfully pre-"ſerved by the Church, as if ſhe inhabited "one houſe, though diſperſed throughout "the whole world; ſhe believes theſe things, "as having but one ſoul and one heart, and "ſhe preaches theſe things in concord, and "teaches and delivers them, as having but "one mouth; for the languages of the world "are diſimilar, but the power of tradition "(that is of Chriſtian inſtruction uniformly "and ſucceſſively adminiſtered,) is the ſame. "And neither do the Churches in Germany "believe otherwiſe, or teach otherwiſe, nor in "Spain, nor among the Celtæ, nor in the Eaſt, "nor in Egypt, nor in Libya, nor ſuch as are "eſtabliſhed in the middle of the world; but "as the ſun created by the Almighty is one "and the ſame in all the world, ſo the preach-"ing of the truth appeareth every where, and "enlighteneth all men, who wiſh to come to "the knowledge of the truth; and neither "will he, amongſt the governors of the church,

* lib. i.

"who

" who is very powerful in ſpeech, ſay things " different from theſe, for no man is above his " maſter, nor will he, who is weak in ſpeech, " invalidate the tradition. For as the faith is " one and the ſame, neither he who can ſay " much uſually adds, nor does he, who can " ſay but little uſually diminiſh." The intereſting cauſe, in which they were engaged prompted them to uſe every method of ſupporting it; they travelled into foreign countries, they correſponded with foreign Churches. Pantænus, the inſtructor of Clemens Alexandrinus, went to preach the Goſpel in India, and ended a long life devoted to the ſervice of religion in the catechetick School of Alexandria, where his very learned Pupil became his ſucceſſor.

That the Chriſtians ſhould worſhip One, who, like a common malefactor, had ſuffered a publick and ignominious death, was a conſtant topick of invective or ridicule among the Pagans: notwithſtanding which, the practice was ingenuouſly acknowledged, and zealouſly vindicated, ſometimes by poſitive declarations, that he was God as well as Man, and that as man he ſuffered; ſometimes *a fortiori* by adverting to the groſſer cuſtoms of the

the Pagans themſelves, who having from gratitude deified the inventors of uſeful things, or from fear the ſuppoſed authors of evil, could, under no circumſtances, with decency or propriety arraign the adoration of Chriſt.

It remains that we make ſome obſervations on the mode of contention with Hereticks. The various opinions, which many entertained and propagated, were ſo abſurd in themſelves, ſo ſubverſive of every thing excellent, and every thing rational in religion, that no warmth of expreſſion, no ſeverity of cenſure ought to excite our wonder. "The* prin-"ciples and doctrines of the ancient Here-"ticks" ſays a learned prelate "were infi-"nitely more ſhocking and abſurd than thoſe "of any modern ſectaries. The reaſon is, "that the ancient Hereticks formed their "tenets on the principles of Pagan philoſo-"phy, while the modern ſectaries form theirs "on the books of Sacred Scripture." It is true that in proceſs of time ſome opinions were ſtigmatized as heretical, which did not affect the eſſentials of Chriſtianity; and the diſpute concerning Eaſter was carried on with a degree of animoſity, which the moſt important

* Introduction to Biſhop Warburton's Julian.

conteſt

conteſt would not juſtify. The original Anathema was no more than an excommunication or temporary excluſion from the Church, the governors of which, like the governors of all other ſocieties, muſt have a right to preſcribe rules for their own internal peace and tranquillity. Indeed, one general idea prevails in the writings of the Fathers, that our Saviour and his Apoſtles had delegated to the miniſters of the Word, but more eſpecially to biſhops, a power of determining controverſies, and deciding upon matters of faith. This power did not imply infallibility. It was an abſurdity reſerved for modern days to imagine that every man was qualified and authorized to frame a ſyſtem of belief for himſelf. The Apoſtles are zealous in their admonitions to unity, and in ſevere denunciations againſt hereſy. St. Paul, particularly, in his firſt epiſtle to Timothy, mentions ſome, [e] *who having put away faith and a good conſcience, concerning Faith have made ſhipwreck. Of whom was Hymenæus and Alexander, whom he had delivered UNTO SATAN that they might learn not to blaſpheme.* After all the diſputes concerning the real interpretation of delivering UNTO SATAN, it ſeems to imply no

[e] 1 Tim. i. 19, 20.

more

more than an excluſion from the Church, from the means of grace and from ſpiritual inſtruction, which, during its continuance, may be conſidered as a temporary dereliction to the power of Satan. The real purpoſe was not to hurry them headlong to deſpair, but to reduce them to a ſenſe of their error and an abhorrence of blaſphemy. Notorious offences in the Primitive Church, whether they regarded principles or practice, were puniſhed in a ſimilar way; a reſtoration to the privileges of communion was purchaſed by many prayers and tears. The power of the keys, which is a name of ſtewardſhip, was exerciſed with becoming ſpirit, and yet with moderation. "It is affirmed from good authority," ſays an able * champion, "that abſolution in "the Primitive Church was nothing elſe than "reſtoring men under the diſpleaſure of the "Church to the Church's peace again." "Under theſe reſtrictions," to uſe the ſame writer's words in another paſſage, "their cen-"ſures were acts of compaſſion as well as of "juſtice, and were equally to be excuſed from "invaſion on the rights and cruelty to the "ſoul of the criminal.

* Rogers of the Viſible Church, p. 83.

The

The alternate Anathemas, which, after the Council of Nice, were denounced by each party againſt the other, as each became victorious, afforded much triumph to the Pagans, as they have done to every unbeliever. Surely, religion itſelf is not chargeable with ſuch abuſes. The purity of the Nicene Faith does depend upon the majority of voices in the Nicene Council, though to ſo conſiderable a majority, when no ſiniſter motive can be proved, when freedom of debate was fully allowed, ſome deference will be paid by moderate men. When ancient terms and expreſſions have been miſunderſtood and perverted, the introduction of others is not only juſtifiable but neceſſary. Nor can we forbear wondering, that, after the *Defenſio fidei Nicænæ*, publiſhed by an eminent * Prelate, and after a late Abſtract of the Opinions of the Fathers of the three firſt Centuries, the † Author of which received from this place a juſt tribute of gratitude, the unlearned ſhould be told, that the Divinity of the Son and Holy Ghoſt was a doctrine of later date. It would at leaſt be ingenuous to acknowledge that there are ſome paſſages in the Fathers which ſeem to favour ſuch an opinion, and that perſons not altogether unac-

* Biſhop Bull. † Dr. Burgh.

quainted

quainted with the learned languages, have deemed them conſtant and zealous in vindicating the worſhip of our bleſſed Saviour. Even Euſebius, who was ſuſpected of Arianiſm, bears this remarkable teſtimony. "By "Juſtin and Miltiades, and Tatian and Cle- "mens, θεολογεῖται ὁ Χριϛὸς, * *Chriſt is declared "to be God.* For who does not know the "books of Irenæus and Melito, and the reſt, "announcing Chriſt to be God and Man? "And how many pſalms and ſongs of the "Brethren, written from the beginning by "the Faithful, celebrate Chriſt the Word of "God, calling him God? How then, after "the doctrine of the Church has been "preached for the ſpace of ſo many years, is "it poſſible that men ſhould have preached, "as they ſay, till the time of Victor? How "are they not aſhamed to utter theſe falſe- "hoods againſt Victor, who excommunicated "Theodotus, the leader and Father of this "apoſtacy, denying God, the firſt who de- "clared Chriſt to be a mere man." In the ſame chapter, Euſebius charges ſectaries with having altered or mutilated the Scriptures.

Need I obſerve, by the way, that perhaps

* Euſeb. Eccl. Hiſt. lib. v. c. 28.

he

he might, among other inſtances, allude to the well known paſſage in the fifth chapter of St. John's firſt Epiſtle, which is now proved to be genuine but which is very far from being the only ſupport of the Trinitarian cauſe? The attempts made by ſome to explain the doctrine by familiar compariſons were as unſucceſsful as they were injudicious. Well, therefore, might Juſtin Martyr ſay, * "If I wiſhed "to ſhew by human documents or proofs "the myſtery of Chriſt becoming man you "ought not to bear with me." And Hilary, in many parts of his Treatiſe concerning the Trinity, owns the difficulty of expreſſing in human language what ſurpaſſes human conception. How awful the ſubject appeared to him may be learnt from the following expreſſion, † *Trepido in dicto, et me inſolens ſermo commovet.* No wonder that he who checks preſumption in himſelf ſhould inveigh againſt it in others; ſome of whom, he ſays, conceal ſuch preſumption under the appearance of the greateſt modeſty, *ut verecunde in defenſione ſit, quod impudenter in ſenſu eſt.*

It was not intended, in the foregoing obſervations, to deny or to vindicate the defects

* Cum Triphone Dial. † de Trin. lib. 2.

of

the Primitive Fathers. Of Origen the following judgment is given. *Ubi bene, nemo melius; ubi male, nemo pejus.* Yet, as he advanced in life, he retracted many of his errors, and the want of his learned work, is a ſerious loſs to ſacred literature.

Wiſe and good men, in almoſt all ages, have advanced ſome opinions, which, though not perfectly juſt, are not ſo abſurd, as they are repreſented. A voluntary dereliction of the vanities, the cares, and the pleaſures of this world, for the ſake of being more immediately devoted to the ſervice of God, appeared to many of the Fathers meritorious. Perhaps they were confirmed in their notions by an improper interpretation of our Saviour's words in the 19th chapter of St. Matthew, and St. Paul's obſervations in 1 Cor. vii. concerning Celibacy. Surely they are not anſwerable for all the abuſes of darker ages, and the determination of the Council of Nice on the ſubject is well known. The truth is, ſolitude has its temptations, and that life is moſt pleaſing to God, which is moſt profitable to man.

Many of them ſeem to condemn a ſtate of warfare. They probably thought that it had a tendency to enflame the paſſions, and that the habit of deſtroying or harraſſing our fellow-creatures, would weaken and gradually wear away the feelings of humanity. They ſaw its horrors in their utmoſt malignity, they ſaw it carried on without even the pretence of redreſſing grievances. *Cernes tu itinera latronibus clauſa, maria obſeſſa prædonibus, cruento honore caſtrorum bella ubique diviſa; madet orbis mutuo ſanguine, et homicidium cum admittunt ſinguli, crimen eſt, virtus vocatur cum publicè geritur; impunitatem ſceleribus acquirit non innocentiæ ratio, ſed ſævitiæ magnitudo.* Civilized manners have leſſened the horrors of war; and we may flatter ourſelves, that ſhould we be unfortunately involved in future contention, the ſame generous ſpirit will prevail among the contending parties. A proper contempt of life, upon Chriſtian principles, is a noble attainment, and he who ſtands forth in defence of his country deſerves more gratitude than almoſt any country is willing to ſhew. Yet, laudable as it is for individuals thus to meet danger, Providence has taught kingdoms at large, that war is a ſcourge even to the victorious. The advantages of it are more

ſpecious than real; conqueſt is more ſplendid than beneficial: commerce itſelf with wealth introduces luxury, and multiplies our wants. After we have been dazzled by the exploits of the warrior, let us turn our attention to treaties and compacts, and the deluſion will vaniſh.

It was well ſaid of Biſhop Latimer, "I lay "no ſtreſs upon the Fathers, except when "they lay a ſtreſs upon Scripture." No tradition, however ancient, can add to the eſſentials of Faith, but it is one thing to be an inventor, and another thing to be a commentator; it is one thing to be a dictator, and another thing to be an auxiliary: the preſervation of decency, regularity, and good government, has been in all ages principally left to the prudence of man; nor will expreſſions ſomewhat too forcible be any argument againſt Epiſcopal authority. "We are not concerned "(to uſe the words of an eminent defender "of Epiſcopal ordination) for any high flights "or any reaſonings of the ancients, but barely "their teſtimony about a matter of fact, that "Epiſcopacy was the government of the "Church and of apoſtolical Inſtitution. We ſhall have an opportunity, hereafter, of ſeeing more

more clearly, that our Church has taught a proper leſſon of moderation. And may we, conſiſtently with ſuch moderation, endeavour to ſelect from every age and from every country whatever is amiable, commendable and uſeful; may neither prejudice of education, nor malignity, nor preſumption, nor fondneſs for novelty, induce us to reject opinions becauſe they are ancient, or modes of worſhip becauſe they were adopted in primitive times, and abuſed or perverted by ſucceeding ignorance and ſuperſtition; always remembering that our Saviour, ſo far from altering a Liturgy, in a certain degree unedifying and jejune, ſelected from it part of his own moſt perfect Form of Prayer, that much imperfection is to be found in every performance and every eſtabliſhment of man, but that thoſe who are moſt diſcontented, and moſt clamorous for reformation are generally the leaſt qualified to effect it; for true wiſdom is* *pure, peaceable, gentle, eaſy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocriſy.*

* James 3. xvii.

SERMON

# SERMON IV.

PSAL. lxxx. V. 9.

THOU PREPAREDST ROOM BEFORE IT, THOU DIDST CAUSE IT TO TAKE DEEP ROOT, AND IT FILLED THE LAND.

THE genuine ſimplicity of Chriſtian Faith and Chriſtian Worſhip was but of ſhort duration. After the three, or at moſt the four, firſt centuries, every ſucceeding age became memorable only by a new train of uſeleſs, and often worſe than uſeleſs, ceremonies. The power of the Sovereign Pontiff of Rome ſoon gained an eſtabliſhment. Much blood and treaſure were loſt in an Enterprize, firſt dictated by mad zeal, and carried on with unabating fury, and with viſionary hopes of heavenly aſſiſtance. The manſions of learning were but few, and thoſe few

bounded with barbarous compoſitions, and ſcholaſtic jargon. The excellent models of Greece and Rome were little attended to, and ſcarce underſtood. The manſions of piety and devotion abounded with idleneſs, effeminacy, luxury, and every kind of vice. The very altars became a refuge for thoſe who by their crimes had forfeited all pretenſions to the pity of their fellow creatures, and the protection of ſociety. The fulminations of the Biſhop of Rome had terrified and humiliated kings themſelves; had ſometimes overturned thrones, or had ſhaken their foundations. The power of Abſolution, which was granted to the Miniſters of Chriſt for the encouragement of repenting ſinners, had long been a ſource of wealth, and a plea for extortion. *The commandments of men were taught for doctrines*, and the clamours for implicit and unbounded deference grew louder, in proportion as the juſt title to it became weaker.

Unbelievers have enlarged upon theſe abuſes, ſome of which excite pity rather than indignation, with a deſign to diſparage the Chriſtian Religion; and there may be ſatire, but there is no argument, in deriding ambi-

tious

tious prelates, and in ſtiling them at the ſame moment the ſucceſſors of meek and indigent Apoſtles.

Waving therefore that calumny, which carries no real ſting, we have reaſon to rejoice that the revival of learning created a ſpirit of enquiry. Improvements of every kind are gradual, and attended with difficulty. Succeeding generations are not ſenſible of every impediment. Rooted prejudices are not removed without great labour and circumſpection. Precipitate meaſures defeat their own purpoſes.

The effects of Wickliffe's preaching were probably more important than we at preſent imagine. The fear of puniſhment may and often does prevent outward and publick oppoſition, but operates little upon individuals, and upon private ſocieties united together by one common cauſe. Indeed the Lollards were numerous in defiance of every menace.

The obſervations which it is intended to make on the conduct and principles of our firſt Reformers will not admit of methodical arrangement. If we can ſilence objections

which are frivolous, and anſwer ſuch as are important, our zeal in the common cauſe will be animated, and the humbleſt efforts may be crowned with a ſmall degree of ſucceſs.

To an impartial enquirer it will perhaps be obvious, that in contemplating the Reformation, as in contemplating other material changes, both friends and enemies have laid too great a ſtreſs upon the character and conduct of the ſeveral parties concerned. Malignity has exaggerated, miſtaken candour has attempted to defend, avowed miſcarriages and defects. As if our bleſſed Maſter had foreſeen the perverſeneſs of men in arguing againſt his Religion from the conduct of its Teachers, he made him an Apoſtle who he knew was a Traitor. If his treachery, if the puſillanimity of St. Peter, if the general defection of the Diſciples, be no diſparagement to the Goſpel, with what propriety is ſo much invective accumulated upon the firſt Reformers? * Luther, in particular, has been ſtigmatiſed with unmerited reproach. Perfect purity of conduct is ſcarce ever to be

* See Bayle's Life. and Moſheim, 4to edit. V. II.

expected

expected where human nature is concerned. Diſappointment and avarice produced in him the firſt oppoſition to Papal power; but what begun in reſentment might be carried on from better motives. Theſe motives being not ſubject to human cognizance, muſt be left to the Tribunal to which alone he is amenable.* As little to the purpoſe of our adverſaries was it to arraign the character of Henry the eighth. Indeed, he is not to be conſidered as a Reformer, though he firſt prepared the way. † The learned Commentator on the Laws of England has juſtly obſerved, that in his reign "the ſpirit of perſecution was "not abated, but only diverted in a lay chan-"nel;" and, after ſtating the law of the ſix articles which eſtabliſhed the ſix moſt conteſted points of Popery, he allows "that this "Prince was equally intent on deſtroying "the Supremacy of the Biſhops of Rome, "and eſtabliſhing all other their corruptions "of the Chriſtian Religion." Such a mode of conduct promiſed none of the ſalutary ef-

* Eraſmus ſays of Luther—Hominis vita magno omnium conſenſu probatur. Jam id non leve præjudicium eſt tantam eſſe morum integritatem, ut nec hoſtes reperiant quod calumnientur. Epiſtola ad Thomam Cardinalem, as quoted by Atterbury.

† Book 4. C. 2.

fects

fects which an abjuration of Papal authority afterwards produced. It was no remedy againſt tyranny only to have changed the tyrant; and however ill qualified Eccleſiaſticks in general were to judge what was hereſy, however they were diſpoſed to ſtigmatize with that name any opinion which called in queſtion their own authority, they were, generally ſpeaking, ſuperior in knowledge, and equal in integrity, to thoſe who wreſted the ſpiritual power from their hands. An unrelenting bigotry poſſeſſed all ranks of people.

Though it be allowed, according to the learned Commentator abovementioned, that the Reformation was not eſtabliſhed till the days of Elizabeth "with temper and decency, "unſullied with party rancour, or perſonal "caprice and reſentment," yet juſtice and gratitude require us to pay a proper tribute of reſpect to the memory of thoſe, who began the Reformation in the days of Edward the ſixth, ſome of whom were Martyrs in the days of Mary, and who left more than the outlines, and more than the foundation, of that fabrick, which, we truſt, no ſtorms or tempeſts will ever deſtroy.

It

It was never ſuſpected by any of theſe venerable perſons, that in purifying the Church of England from the corruptions of the Church of Rome, no ſyſtem of faith and practice ſhould be eſtabliſhed, that every one ſhould think and act what was right in his own eyes. The Scriptures were tranſlated, *The Inſtitution of a Chriſtian Man* was publiſhed, Articles were drawn up with as much care, judgment and expedition as the times admitted, and the Exiles, in Queen Mary's time, had an opportunity of collecting the ſenſe, and profiting by the inſtructions, of the Reformed Churches abroad. 'Tis true, that with much good they imbibed ſome prejudices inconſiſtent with that moderation which was afterwards obſerved in the national eſtabliſhment. If aſperity of manners, and inflexibility in ſmaller matters, were chargeable on foreign Churches, ſome allowance muſt be made for the times. Even in theſe days the ſpirit of controverſy has betrayed men into vulgar and indecent language. Surely then Luther and Calvin have a claim to ſome indulgence; and it may be added, once for all, that religious toleration was very imperfectly underſtood till a much later period.

In

In inveſtigating the general principles of the Reformers, we find one generally imputed to them which has created the ridicule of Popery on the one hand, and given a ſanction to all the wildneſs and extravagance of enthuſiaſts and ſectaries on the other. The principle in ſubſtance is this: Whatever right any body of men claims to ſeparate from a Church once eſtabliſhed, the ſame right every individual may claim to form a ſyſtem of doctrines and opinions for himſelf. The fallacy of abſtract propoſitions often remains undiſcovered till they are applied to the ſeveral caſes which they are ſuppoſed to comprehend. In the propoſition before us, two points muſt be proved. Firſt, it muſt be proved that all errors have the ſame dangerous tendency; that, for inſtance, what the Diſſenters call exceſs, in outward decorations, is equally prejudicial to the true ſpirit of Religion with all thoſe Commandments of Men which are enforced by the Church of Rome, and which it is contended, by all the Reformed Churches, are not to be found in the Goſpel. The Sacred Writers only give general rules for the preſervation of decency and order, and they always diſtinguiſh between what is abſolutely neceſſary and what is merely prudential. Surely, there are different

rent degrees of diſſent as well as of aſſent; ſurely, all denominations of Chriſtian are not in faith, doctrine and diſcipline at an equal diſtance from each other. Nothing but the particular object of controverſy can juſtly be adduced in defence of ſeparation; and till a perfect equality between one object of diſpute and another can be proved, which is impoſſible, every Separatiſt muſt ſtand upon his own ground, muſt engage with his own peculiar weapons, and muſt be cautious even of quoting Scripture upon minuter circumſtances, which the Sacred Writers never undertook to adjuſt. It is, for example, very abſurd to argue from the acts of an infant Church, aſſembled under peculiar hardſhips and diſcouragement, confined to a ſmall diſtrict, and comprehending a few Proſelytes, concerning the nature of Church Government, after the whole maſs of the people are become Chriſtians. Much more diſingenuous is it to argue againſt Epiſcopacy from the etymology of a word, which, like other names of authority, care, and ſuperintendance, ſeems to have had firſt a general, and afterwards a technical, ſignification. New offices in all countries and all languages have been frequently pointed out by old appellations.

The

The other point, which muſt be proved before the propoſition can be concluſive, is ſtill more perplexing to the advoeates of unlimited liberty: viz. that individuals are qualified by their learning, their ingenuity, and their induſtry, ſo to compare Scripture with Scripture, ſo to interpret the Word of God, as to form for themſelves a regular ſyſtem of of doctrines. Inſtances of groſs and notorious deluſion are ſo numerous, that the recital would be as offenſive as it is unneceſſary. Suffice it to ſay, that credulity and fanaticiſm have had unaccountable influence, nor will ſuch influence ever ceaſe as long as a heated imagination ſhall ſubſtitute its reveries in the place of cool reaſoning. Nor could ignorant, deluded, unhappy men have gained ſo great an aſcendancy over the minds of their fellow creatures without the aid of pretended inſpiration. Perhaps it will be ſaid, that thoſe founders of ſects, whoſe extravagances have been the ſubject of ridicule or pity, have given riſe to ſyſtems of belief which many able and ingenious men have deemed rational and conſiſtent. The truth is, groſſer abſurdities have been renounced, or explained away. A Communion of Chriſtians, formerly the moſt turbulent, the moſt extravagant, the moſt

moſt devoid of all decency, is now become peaceable, cool, inoffenſive. The folly of the Founder was diſavowed by ſucceeding Proſelytes, ſome of whom reduced to a ſyſtem the ſcattered materials, which had been collected without method, and were united without coherence. Simplicity of dreſs and manners, and a proper controul over the morals of their Congregation, has induced the Legiſlature from time to time to grant them every indulgence which prudence can juſtify, and has inclined Chriſtians of all denominations to treat them with candour. Did other Sectaries practiſe the ſame degree of peaceable modeſty, the prejudices of men would gradually ſubſide, unity of affection would not be inconſiſtent with diverſity of opinion, and the accuſations, which are uttered with confidence againſt various denominations, but which conſtitute no part of their Religion, would be heard no more.

At the ſame time, it cannot be too frequently or too ſtrenuouſly inſiſted upon, that where ignorance, inſtead of being inſtructed, attempts, under any pretence whatſoever, to inſtruct, the inſtruction muſt be contemptible, and that legal indulgence granted for ſuch

ſuch a purpoſe, though it cannot, or will not, be withdrawn, yet it is in deed and in truth a detriment inſtead of an advantage. Every Zealot for Civil, as well as for Religious, Liberty, is willing to flatter the multitude, in order that he may gain them over to his party, as if truth depended upon numbers, and upon popular applauſe. The ſober minded man appeals to wiſdom, diligence, and experience, and diſdains the abſurd and preſumptuous judgment of thoſe Aſſemblies of ignorant or deluded men, the greater part of whom know not, or conſider not, what they ſay.

The deſire of change, when carried to an extreme, is dangerous: it inclines men to be diſſatisfied with every thing which already exiſts. From this extreme our Reformers kept a proper diſtance, which is the more to be wondered at, becauſe they were ſufficiently exaſperated by the Perſecutions in the reign of Mary.

Exceſſive prejudice againſt every thing that wore the aſpect of Popery, was chargeable only to the Puritans. The Reformers were ſenſible that a religion purely mental

is

is ill ſuited to the infirmity of man. Our Lord himſelf, in the inſtitution of the two Sacraments, condeſcended to this infirmity. As the principal conteſt aroſe concerning the Holy Euchariſt, a few obſervations may be requiſite to remove the charge of improper innovation on the one hand, and indolent acquieſcence on the other. The primitive Feaſts of Love did but too much reſemble a common entertainment. To diſcern the Lord's Body would be difficult even to the moſt prudent and circumſpect. From the grave and ſolemn offices of Religion it is neceſſary to exclude the very appearance of feſtivity. Men have houſes to eat and to drink in, they can ſatisfy the demands of nature, they can indulge the warrantable deſire of amuſement, at other times, and in more proper places. And what juſt objection could be brought againſt the poſture of kneeling, when the people were informed it implied no adoration of the elements? Self-examination was recommended as preparatory and beneficial; for who does not know that every religious act is efficacious in proportion as the mind is previouſly prepared? If the ignorant or the timid have encompaſſed the holy Euchariſt with imaginary terrors, the Reformers are

not anſwerable for the conſequences of other men's miſtakes. If, as ſome would perſuade us, it be a mere commemoration of Chriſt's ſufferings; if ſelf examination, occaſional abſtinence, a purification of the heart from all rancour and reſentment, and a ſolemn renunciation of ſin, be unneceſſary, wherein will it differ from the plain and conſtant acknowledgment of Chriſt's ſufferings, with which moſt of our prayers conclude? The idea of a feaſt after the ſacrifice, familiar to the Jews, and now well eſtabliſhed among Chriſtians, guards every true member of the Church of England againſt each extreme; and if it be ſaid that ſuch an explication, not well underſtood by the ignorant, creates an inequality among Chriſtians where equal benefit was intended, let us not forget, that every degree of ſuperiority in natural or acquired abilities enables us to perform the offices of religion with additional conviction, and encreaſing energy. In purity of intention the moſt ignorant and the moſt intelligent may be equal. But Religion is a ſervice of the underſtanding no leſs than of the will and affections. The dominion of the former ſhould increaſe in proportion to its cultivation, as all authority gains ſtrength in proportion to the diſcretion of him who poſſeſſes

poſſeſſes it. The Philoſopher ſurveys the natural and the intellectual world to a worſe than an uſeleſs purpoſe, unleſs he become more thankful for the bleſſings of creation, preſervation, redemption and ſanctification.

A cool and a moderate Reformer, conſcious of the difficulties he has to encounter, will extend his care to flagrant and notorious abuſes. He will endeavour to retain whatever is rational in the eſtabliſhment he wiſhes to amend. Our firſt Reformers ſaw nothing anti-chriſtian in the different gradations of honour and dignity which a regular government had rendered neceſſary. Though ſome of them, or of their ſucceſſors, wiſhed for *Chorepiſcopi*, yet they found that the adminiſtration of eccleſiaſtical law, and the ſuperintendance of the parochial miniſters, was already delegated in various portions and degrees to the inferior clergy, that nothing but ordination, which even St. Jerom allowed to be peculiar to biſhops, and confirmation, was excluſively annexed to epiſcopal dignity. The other names of office, ſo offenſive to men of levelling principles, were not to be found indeed in the Scriptures; and yet, had the Puritans conſidered the matter coolly, they might have diſ-

covered that theſe very dignities, granted to what we deem the ſecond order, were ſo many approaches to the equality contended for; and, as no form of Church Government could be invented which muſt not give either permanent or occaſional ſuperiority to ſome part of the Clergy, it was more rational in itſelf, and more concilatory towards the Church of Rome, to retain the ancient names and the ancient powers, as far as they regarded the care of ſouls. The Puritans continually objected againſt the Reformers, that being engaged in a common conteſt with Popery, they had a right to every indulgence, to a participation of the honours and emoluments of the eſtabliſhed Church. It is no part of *our* cauſe, ſince the Act of Toleration, to defend the Star chamber or High Commiſſion Courts. Yet, conſidering the nature of the times, much more indulgence was ſhewn to individuals of learning and real worth, than could almoſt have been expected; and many, from their own inſolence, were brought forward to puniſhment, who, with common prudence and moderation, might have ended their lives in tranquillity. But an excluſion from appointments in the Church was neceſſary for ſelf-defence. No degree of merit can entitle any one

one to be placed under an eſtabliſhment which he diſapproves. * *He that is not with me is againſt me; and he that gathereth not with me ſcattereth abroad.* A little knowledge with much modeſty will do more ſervice to religion than moroſeneſs or preſumption joined with the greateſt talents. All poſſible care was taken in the reign of Elizabeth to procure competent miniſters, and wherever their incompetency was manifeſt, their power was proportionably reſtrained. The practical diſcourſes enjoined to be read were calculated for the edification of the people, and the high notions of prerogative, with vehement admonitions againſt rebellion, to be found in them, were accounted for from the hiſtory of the times. Even now it would be abſurd to ſtate to popular aſſemblies what theſe caſes of extreme neceſſity may be, in which ſubjects might riſe againſt their ſovereign. The Liturgy prevented all from offering crude and undigeſted petitions. The Puritans objected that ſcripture language was not uſed, little conſidering how much of the Scripture was incorporated into the daily ſervice, and that a varied form is a conſtant comment.

* Matt. xii. 30.

The Aſſembly of Divines in the following age, when they drew the plan to be obſerved by their miniſters, explain the leading cauſe of oppoſition for the Puritans and for themſelves, if we can at all conſider them as two parties, for *they* openly avow "*that "the Liturgy has given great encouragement to an idle and unedifying miniſtry, "who choſe rather to confine themſelves "to modes made to their hands, than to "exert themſelves in the exerciſe of the "*gift of prayer with which our Saviour "furniſhes all thoſe, whom he calls to that "office.*" The ſame Hiſtorian tells us in another place, "‡That there was ſuch a clamour "againſt the High Clergy, that they could "hardly officiate according to the late injunctions, without being affronted, or walk "the ſtreets in their habits, without being "reproached as Popiſh Prieſts, as Cæſar's "friends. The reputation of the Liturgy "began to ſink, reading prayers was called "uſeleſs form of worſhip, and *a quenching "the Holy Spirit, whoſe aſſiſtances are promiſed "in the matter as well as the manner of our "prayers.*" What an accurate delineation is

* Neal, Vol. II. p. 107, 4to. Edit. ‡ Vol. I. p. 662.

this

this of the prejudices ſtill ſubſiſting among ſome of the people in a neighbouring Kingdom, and how truly to be pitied is the narrowneſs of mind which ſuch prejudices ever betray?

The Act of Uniformity has often been cenſured from the practice of primitive times, in which it was left to the care of every Biſhop to preſcribe a form of prayer for his own diſtrict, or, as they will have it who oppoſe Epiſcopacy, to every Preſbyter for his own Church. While the Faith continued the ſame among Chriſtians, the uſage, as we believe it to have prevailed, was attended with no inconvenience. But too ſoon a deſire of popularity tempted the * Biſhops to gratify the people, whoſe ſuffrages had been, or were expected to be, the cauſe of their promotion. In proceſs of time, each added ſome new cuſtom or ceremony, till the ſpirit of religion was loſt in external appearances. The Act of Uniformity removed every ſuch inconvenience. It gave permanence to the Book of Common Prayer, and ſhut out every fanciful invention. And

* See Bingham.

are not the general wants and the general bleſſings of mankind the ſame throughout the World? If national calamities or national bleſſings ſhould call for appropriated ſervices, the Governors of the Church are at hand to provide for ſuch exigencies, and the difficulty of compoſing ſuitable ſervices is acknowledged by every diſpaſſionate and intelligent Chriſtian. The language of want and of gratitude ſhould be ſimple and expreſſive, too much labour on the one hand, and too much inattention on the other, will be fatal to the real purpoſes of devotion. But preſumption is adventurous and precipitate, while prudence is conſiderate and cautious.

Hoſtile as many of the Reformed Churches were to Epiſcopacy, from the beginning it was not ſo. For, to uſe the words of Strype, "Bullinger, Calvin, and others, offered to "make King Edward their defender, and to "have Biſhops in their Churches, as there "were in England, with the tender of their "ſervice to aſſiſt and unite together.*" But notwithſtanding many wholeſome admonitions ſent into this Kingdom when the Puritans conſulted ſome of the foreign di-

* Life of Cranmer, p. 207.

vines

vines upon various ſubjects of Church diſcipline, a republican ſpirit gained aſcendancy, and Geneva felt a tyranny equal to that which ſhe had ſhaken off.

The retention of Epiſcopacy, was of all other things, the moſt offenſive to the Puritans. All their ſatire, all their ſarcaſms and all their wit were exhauſted upon this topick. And after ſo many defences of epiſcopal government, it might appear either unneceſſary or preſumptuous to attempt a farther vindication. A few words, however, may not be unſeaſonable, concerning the worldly dignity annexed to Epiſcopacy, which has excited ſo much envy and given ſo much offence. To infer from the abuſes of paſt times any real ground of ſuſpicion in the preſent is to make an invidious compariſon, where there is no ſimilarity. But men endeavour to perſuade us that an attendance upon the legiſlative body of the kingdom, and an engagement in temporal concerns, are inconſiſtent with the nature of a ſpiritual function. Charles the Firſt, who was uniform and conſiſtent in retaining the Biſhops, laid great ſtreſs upon immemorial uſage, which, except in caſes glaringly abſurd, is a firm

firm and permanent foundation. Many things would otherwiſe return to their original confuſion. And it will be no difficult matter to prove that this part of the Conſtitution ought not to be given up.

Every one, liberally educated, prepares himſelf for the ſtudy of Theology by the acquiſition of uſeful knowledge of other kinds. And of this knowledge none is more material to the well being of ſociety than an inveſtigation of the general rights of mankind, and the various modes of adjuſting thoſe rights by municipal law. Who ever complained that the labours of the mathematician, the philoſopher, or the linguiſt, were inconſiſtent with the clerical office? Who pretends to exclude the Clergy even from a moderate attention to thoſe arts which add to the convenience, or contribute to the liberal amuſement, of mankind? Why then ſhould the character of a Legiſlator, ſo truly ſacred and ſo truly important, be thought unſuitable to their vocation, or inconſiſtent with it's more immediate duties? Every wiſe government will endeavour to ſecure the accumulated wiſdom of every profeſſion. Attendance upon the duties of each gives life and vigour

vigour to the faculties, quickneſs of thought and facility of communication.

But it is ſuggeſted, that popular elections would remedy ſome defects in the preſent nomination of biſhops as well as of the inferior Clergy. So fatal was the deſire of popularity in primitive times, that a law was made to prohibit an occaſional ſuperintendant from filling the vacant ſee. The people are only judges of the morals; they are captivated by appearances, by attainments which are neither the effect of ingenuity nor of induſtry. Dignity of character is often loſt in an endeavour to pleaſe them.

A fondneſs for paſtoral poetry and rural retirement has led ſome into a miſtaken opinion that the inferior claſſes of men are, in general, ſincere, induſtrious and inoffenſive. Experience evinces the very reverſe, and there is probably moſt virtue in thoſe, who, by a moderate cultivation of the mind are free from the corruptions of groſs ignorance, and yet are not tempted by an exceſs of wealth, and the flattery which wealth creates, to deſert the path of innocence and real honour.

We

We have ſtudied the Ancients to little purpoſe, if we have not learnt a proper contempt for the crude opinions of the vulgar. And truly miſerable is the lot of thoſe, whoſe ſucceſs depends upon the caprice of the multitude. Still more wretched are they whom the congregation can deprive of the very power of miniſtring in holy things. Many, under all or ſome of theſe circumſtances, have been happy that they could recede with honour from a charge to which ſo little honour was annexed, and that they could have recourſe to other employments, attended with greater advantage and leſs dependance. * "I muſt obſerve to you (ſays a "learned Prelate,) that in pariſhes and places, "where the people chuſe their own miniſ-"ters, there are the greateſt diviſions and "quarrels, the greateſt feuds and paſſions re-"markable; as unqualified miniſters as in "other places, and, perhaps it may be ſaid "alſo, the greateſt number of Diſſenters from "the eſtabliſhed Church. Nothing hath been "the cauſe of greater violence and ſtrife, and "ill will amongſt neighbours, than this "choice; and the time of election is com-

* Reaſonableneſs of Conformity, 276, fol. edit.

"monly

"monly the time of heat and anger, and it "ends often in a bad choice, and in the "alienation of the minds of many men from "their brethren, and from their miniſter, "worthy or not worthy".

The Puritans complained, that though the Doctrine of Predeſtination was to be found in the Articles of the Church, yet they were prohibited from preaching it. The truth is, from the very beginning of the Reformation, ſome of the wiſeſt men were well aware of the difficulty of the ſubject, and yet were compelled, by the neceſſity of the times, to frame an Article, which, comprehending two parties widely differing from each other, is more an article of peace than of information. We are no ſtrangers in theſe days what gloomineſs on the one hand, and what preſumption on the other, the doctrine has created. Inſtead of that comfortable hope of a gracious reception from the Father of Mercies, which every true Chriſtian feels when he enters or leaves the Houſe of God, we ſee many unhappy men entering or leaving their conventicles with downcaſt looks and ſad countenances, their health is gradually impaired, and the pleaſures of friendly intercourſe

courſe are totally loſt. We may ſay of their Religion, with truth, that it hath neither the promiſe of this life, nor of that which is to come. And we may aſſert, with equal truth and confidence, that no government in any age could iſſue forth a more wiſe, a more uſeful, and a more conſolatory prohibition on the ſubject of Religion, than this very Prohibition which the Puritans ſo ſeverely condemned.

That the Articles concerning grace, faith, and good works, lean towards the ſide of enthuſiaſm, is neither to be condemned nor wondered at. The errors to which they were oppoſed will at once explain and juſtify ſuch language. It is a familiar but expreſſive compariſon, that, to make the crooked ſtraight, we muſt bend the contrary way. Oppoſite errors in our times require a different kind of religious inſtruction, and yet it is a falſe and malicious charge againſt the eſtabliſhed Clergy, that they do not ſufficiently enforce the neceſſity of faith, and the true efficacy of grace.

The advocates for a new eſtabliſhment, and the oppoſers of all eſtabliſhments, have enquired,

enquired, whether, upon the ſuppoſition that the Reformation had been deferred till our days, the Articles would not have been materially different from the preſent. No advantage is given by allowing that they certainly would. In proportion to the dangers which ſurround us, we naturally prepare our defence. That he who engages to ſupport a ſyſtem may, in the progreſs of life, find, or, which is the ſame as to the effect upon his conduct, imagine, himſelf miſtaken, cannot be denied. But the evils ariſing from ignorance, inſtability, and preſumption, are infinitely greater than any one eſtabliſhment ever produced; for in all of them we muſt often diſtinguiſh the miſconduct of individuals from the ſeeming or the real imperfections of the eſtabliſhments themſelves.

Articles, like human laws, are liable to perverſion, evaſion, or miſconſtruction. The prudence and the induſtry of Interpreters diminiſhes thoſe evils which it cannot prevent. Ours are uſefully retained, as comprehending a hiſtory of the religion of the times in which they were framed, and as expreſſing the reaſons of our ſeparation from the Church of Rome on the one hand, and the Puritans on the other. And though he, who keeps the moderate

moderate path between two parties, be in danger of diſpleaſing each, yet he gains the approbation of the cool and conſiderate; and if party zeal deprive him of much praiſe, and ſubject him to much cenſure, during his lifetime, poſterity will applaud his magnanimity, and vindicate the propriety of his conduct.

Our Reformers, aided by the civil power, laid the foundation of religious liberty; ſucceeding times enacted laws to ſtrengthen what was weak, and to amend what was imperfect. The hierarchy is diſarmed of all its terrors; eccleſiaſtical law is adminiſtered principally by the laity; and that power in temporal concerns, which by a forced conſtruction was firſt granted to the Church, and continued to be exerciſed by ſpiritual perſons, is now in the hands of profeſſional men, acting with all the regularity and accuracy of other courts. Let every attempt to excite jealouſy between one kind of juriſdiction and another be oppoſed with unremitting induſtry; and if the oppoſition ſhould not meet with deſerved ſucceſs, may it never betray us into murmuring and diſcontent, but animate our endeavours to be true and faithful miniſters of the Prince of Peace.

SERMON

# SERMON V.

## 2 COR. I. 24.

NOT FOR THAT WE HAVE DOMINION OVER YOUR FAITH, BUT ARE HELPERS OF YOUR JOY.

IF the Church of England, aſſiſted as ſhe has been from time to time by the Legiſlature, claimed an abſolute authority over the belief of mankind, ſhe might be juſtly charged with intolerance; and the words of the text, inſtead of being what we apprehend them to be, the rule of her conduct, would only be the ſentence of her condemnation. To claim greater deference than was claimed by the Apoſtles themſelves would be the very height of preſumption. * A well known Hiſtorian, who omits no opportunity of ridiculing or diſparaging reli-

* Hume.

gion, under the pretence of cenſuring ſome of the particular defects of its profeſſors, has aſſerted that Prieſts of all denominations are bigots. That he, who has been educated according to the tenets of any one communion, whoſe inclination has led him to examine thoſe tenets, to refute the arguments of gainſayers, to meet every objection, and to find out new reaſons by which his faith is corroborated, ſhould, during the progreſs of his enquiries, be animated with increaſing zeal, is natural and unavoidable. The ſame thing happens in the purſuit of any other kind of knowledge. The philoſopher, the mathematician, the philologiſt, the antiquarian, and the cultivator of any of the fine arts, all of them claim ſome indulgence from mankind, if their favourite employment fill them with a peculiar degree of ardour. Such ardour increaſes their diligence, and cauſes even the effuſions of fancy to be received with candour. The ſolid advantages accruing to ſociety from their labours infinitely counterbalance any inconveniences ariſing from a few conjectures, apparently viſionary and ill ſupported. Eſſentials all the time retain their dignity and importance. Why then ſhould that candour which is ſhewn to

others

others be denied to the Miniſters of Chriſt? Is Theology a ſcience of leſs utility than others? Does it not derive ſome weight even from ingenious opinions, to which future induſtry may give additional ſanction? No dangerous conſequences are to be feared, as long as a proper diſtinction is made between that evidence which is direct and that which is collateral, between abſolute certainty and and mere probability.

How far the charge of intolerance may be juſtly brought againſt individuals, is as unneceſſary to enquire as it would be impoſſible to determine.

It is intended in the following diſcourſe, to point out the unreaſonableneſs of ſuch a charge, againſt the eſtabliſhment itſelf, by vindicating thoſe two parts of it which our adverſaries complain of as moſt uncharitable.

The firſt is, the Sacramental Teſt.

The ſecond is, the Athanaſian Creed.

And firſt, let us conſider the Sacramental Teſt.

It were eaſy to prove, if the proof could anſwer any good purpoſe, that when the

Preſbyterian Party prevailed in this kingdom, they did not give a perfect pattern of that lenity which their ſucceſſors have already experienced, much leſs of that which has been ſo often ſolicited. Perhaps party rancour in all Chriſtians is much abated, and it would be unjuſt to appropriate that cenſure to any one denomination, which, in certain degrees, was due to all. It is much more to our purpoſe to remind men, that though the opinion of a majority in any kingdom be no teſt of truth, yet it muſt be the principle of a religious eſtabliſhment to be ſupported by the Civil Power. If thoſe, who think differently, be allowed the free exerciſe of their religon, as far as may be conſiſtent with the ſupport of Chriſtianity and the well being of ſociety, they have all that they can reaſonably claim, and they ought not to aſk for more. The example of the principal and of inferior magiſtrates is of peculiar efficacy in recommending and enforcing the national religion. If honour and emolument were held out to the oppoſers of ſuch religion, they might in time become formidable by their number. Excluſion from offices of truſt is but a negative puniſhment, and has been, upon ſome occaſions, a real benefit. That he who is inveſted with

with additional power of being uſeful to others, ſhould receive the Holy Communion, may be attended with many ſalutary effects, if the perſon receiving it conſider the Legiſlature as addreſſing him to the following purport. "You are now advanced to a more "reſpectable ſtation. An additional truſt "requires additional fidelity. The Holy "Euchariſt will, or ought to, baniſh from "your heart all malice and all reſentment. "Let your inclination to do good increaſe "with your power. After the utmoſt care "and vigilance, the infirmities of human "nature are too diſcernible. Approach "His Altar, commemorate His ſufferings, "who alone can ſuccour you in the hour "of temptation. Comfortable and edifying as this ſolemn ſervice is, let your preſent attendance be an earneſt of future zeal "in that worſhip, which remembers all that "are in authority, with ſo much the greater "earneſtneſs, becauſe their conduct more materially affects the welfare of the community."

After the utmoſt lenity and liberality which can be ſhewn to Sectaries, experience has taught us that they are ſuſpicious of being

ſlightly regarded, that they ſhew a manifeſt partiality to others of the ſame communion; and the levelling principle, which they ſupport in eccleſiaſtical concerns, now and then ſhews itſelf alſo in civil. Their indifference to the eſtabliſhment, their hoſtility to a part of the legiſlative body, their clamours againſt the prerogative, and their democratical ſentiments, juſtified, as they pretend, by the Revolution, render them improper judges of the rights of king and people. If, in the Roman Empire, the eccleſiaſtical reſembled the civil arrangement; if, as a learned * foreigner hath juſtly obſerved, the ſame reſemblance ſubſiſt in England, an obvious concluſion will be drawn, that, as a regular ſubordination is requiſite to preſerve regularity in ſpiritual as well as temporal government, ſimilar methods will be moſt effectual to preſerve it. The alliance between Church and State will hereby be more cloſely cemented, the general turn and genius of a people will be more judiciouſly conſulted, the friend of monarchy will become the friend of epiſcopacy, and he, whoſe habits of thinking, incline him to ſhew deference to the diſpenſers of law and juſtice, will not withold it from the diſpenſers of the Goſpel. Fully ſenſible of the dignity of them

* Moſheim.

all,

all, he will be little inclined to cenſure or to cavil at thoſe outward means, by which dignity muſt be ſupported.

In favour of them who poſſeſs military command, connivance and annual indemnity have all the effects of a diſpenſation. It does not, however, ſeem improper to take care, that they, who live in conſtant danger, ſhould be more eſpecially habituated to attend on divine ordinances, and, in particular, on the Holy Euchariſt, with an injunction, that all thoſe, who concientiouſly differ, ſhould receive it from their own miniſters. Military government is eſtabliſhed upon its own maxims, and demands greater degrees of ſubjection. It precludes that turbulence which diſtracts the community at large; its adjudications are conciſe, and admit of no tedious litigation, for the caſes to be decided are not complex.

Let us, moreover, recollect, that many of the Diſſenters have deviated from their own eſtabliſhment; that they have ſounded an alarm againſt eſtabliſhments in general; that a propoſal to ſubſcribe to the Scriptures might eventually join Chriſtians and Mahometans

together, and that to endeavour to overturn what we deem eſſential doctrines of Chriſtianity, and to ſow diſſatisfaction and diſcontent among the people, is neither conciliatory nor grateful. That this is the language of a conſiderable body, is ſelf evident, and it juſtifies the preſent reſtriction more than a thouſand arguments.

Let us proceed to the conſideration of the Athanaſian Creed.

Its antiquity is often called in queſtion. The learned * Hiſtorian of it has proved that it is of more ancient date than is generally imagined, and that a ſimilar one was compoſed very early by John, Patriarch of *Antioch*. Whatever be it's date, it's agreement with Scripture muſt decide it's title to our approbation. We may, perhaps, be reminded that ſome of our own moſt ſanguine friends have wiſhed to expunge it. But one of them † lived to retract his opinion, and a friend of truth is not to be overawed by authority, however reſpectable, nor ſilenced by popular clamour. And, for the ſake of clear inveſtigation, let us conſider, in the firſt place, the damnatory ſentence at the beginning as a general propoſi-

* Waterland. † Chillingworth.

tion;

tion; and, ſecondly, conſider its application to the particular doctrines of the Creed.

And firſt, let us conſider the damnatory ſentence as a general propoſition. Many Unbelievers and ſome Chriſtians, ſuppoſe opinions to be involuntary, and therefore harmleſs. But let them conſider how far this will carry them. Every wild effuſion of fancy, every ſentiment that may tend to diſturb ſociety, or to infringe upon the rights of individuals, may be pardoned or vindicated upon ſuch a ſuppoſition. And thoſe deluded men, who, under the plea of Scriptural Authority, maintained that all the property of Chriſtians was common, ought, in a religious view, to have been excuſed, whatever animadverſion the civil magiſtrate might take. It is true, that all abſurd and heretical opinions are not equally dangerous, nor imply an equal depravation of mind. So neither are all vices. Different degrees of cenſure muſt be apportioned to the different degrees of malignity. Of the uſe of thoſe talents which God hath given us, we muſt one day render a ſtrict account, and it will then, and then only, be known, whether every man have made a proper uſe of thoſe with which he was entruſted. In the mean time

time, he is to be admoniſhed of this, leſt idleneſs or perverſion ſhould ſhelter themſelves under the plea of ignorance.

Nothing is more expreſsly revealed in Holy Scripture, than that he who does not believe the Chriſtian Religion ſhall be condemned. The Unbeliever ſays he makes not his appeal to the tribunal which Chriſtians have erected againſt him, and that, therefore, ſuch a ſentence can carry no terrors with him. But does he think himſelf a moral agent, accountable to his Creator for his thoughts, words, and actions? If he proceed even thus far, he muſt condemn any notion which undermines the foundation of his boaſted Religion of Nature. By parity of reaſon, Chriſtians may condemn whatever opinions are ſubverſive of their Religion. There is no one point upon which our Divines have inſiſted with more juſtice, and with greater ſtrength of argument, than this, namely—That a rejection of the terms of ſalvation ſubjects men to the danger of eternal perdition. They maintain that man cannot be ſaved by his own deſervings, and that, if he will not be ſaved by the merits of Chriſt, his lot is moſt truly deplorable.

If

If it be ſaid that unbelief may ariſe from a diſorder, or from a defect, in the underſtanding, every ſuch caſe is, by implication, excepted. In thoſe offences which are puniſhable by the laws of the land, previous enquiry is made how far the intention was concerned, and one of the greateſt injuries which one can commit againſt another, will be pardoned, if previous malice and previous intention can be diſproved. Whoever, therefore, interprets the ſentence without ſuch a qualification as is common to all ſtatutes and laws whatſoever, charges us with an abſurdity which he himſelf has created.

Moreover, this ſentence is deemed by us declaratory of the general will of God, and does not imply an abſolute excluſion of every culpable individual from his mercy. We know not what allowances may be made for prejudice of education, or for thoſe prepoſſeſſions which improper aſſociations, or wrong notions of Chriſtian liberty, have introduced. And, if ſuch a conceſſion ſhould be deemed an evaſion of its ſtrict and obvious meaning, which is very far from being intended, let us advert to other denunciations of vengeance againſt unqueſtionable offences. In the Commination

tion Service, the curſes of God againſt all ſinners are rehearſed, and acknowledged by the people to be juſtly due. But did any thinking perſon ever imagine that he was condemning himſelf or others to eternal perdition? Did he ever ſuppoſe that what is deſigned to lead the ſerious Chriſtian to an abhorrence of ſin and a ſincere repentance ſhould be a ſanction for uncharitableneſs or ſink him in deſpair? And if a general deteſtation of wicked practices imply no right nor any intention of condemning individuals, why ſhould ſuch right appear to be claimed, why ſhould ſuch intention be imputed, in repeating what we deem the denunciation of heaven, againſt the open oppoſer, or the treacherous ſupporter of the Chriſtian Faith? *Knowing the terrors of the Lord*, we endeavour to perſuade men to come to the knowledge of the Truth.

But we have been frequently told, that we retain the language and the ſpirit of Popery. Let us not be terrified by invidious names. Many good and uſeful things have been brought into neglect and contempt by odious appellations. Not to enter into the cauſes of our ſeparation from the Church of Rome, and diſapproving, as we hope many of the Romaniſts

manifſts themſelves diſapprove, the temporal puniſhment of ſuch hereſies as muſt be left to a more awful Tribunal, we agree in one point, That whatever is revealed in Scripture, is required to be believed by every Chriſtian upon pain of the heavy wrath of God, and a final condemnation, in caſe of obſtinate perſeverance. If Tranſubſtantiation, Prayers for the dead, Indulgences, Purgatory or any other part of their Inſtitution, which Proteſtants reject, had been found in the ſacred writers, our oppoſition would not be warrantable, we ſhould be *found to fight againſt God.*

Having conſidered the damnatory clauſe as a general propoſition, we are in the ſecond place to conſider how it is applied in the Creed itſelf.

We muſt ever lament that the miſapplied curioſity of men ſhould have made it at all neceſſary to enlarge upon myſterious doctrines. It might have been fortunate for the peace and tranquillity of the Chriſtian Church, if the Apoſtle's Creed had been ſufficient. *But ſince men will be wiſe above what is written,* ſome remedy muſt be found out, which may either ſatisfy or reſtrain their curioſity. And whoever

ever peruſes the ſeveral parts of the Creed before us, will find, that ſo far from creating minute enquiries concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, it is more eſpecially calculated to diſcountenance and prevent them. When the mind enters into a laborious and minute inveſtigation of things which it cannot comprehend, inſenſible of the narrow limits of its own powers, it will be led to ſubſtitute ſome vague or viſionary idea in the place of ſolid and uſeful truth. The union of the divine and human nature in the perſon of Chriſt is not to be explained; and when we are inſtructed to ſay, that "as the reaſonable ſoul "and fleſh is one man, ſo God and Man is "one Chriſt," the *manner* of union is not explained, for we know not *how* the ſoul is united to the body. Unity of perſon and character in the bleſſed Jeſus is aſſerted and enforced againſt all thoſe who have been led to deny a myſtery which they could not explain, the myſtery of God manifeſt in the fleſh, a myſtery which even the Angels deſired to look into, and which could not at all have exiſted, if he had been a mere martyr and a mere man.

That every perſon in the ever bleſſed Trinity is God and Lord, no one denies, who be-

believes in the Trinity, but to ſpeak of them collectively as three Gods and three Lords, has an air of Polytheiſm. Sublime truths require modeſty and caution in our expreſſions, and whatever checks preſumption, prepares the mind for the reception of ſound and uſeful doctrine. The abuſe of Scriptural language firſt occaſioned a deviation from it in Creeds, and common candour will compel all parties to acknowledge the difficulty of finding proper words to expreſs ſo much as it was intended for us to know, and no more. This difficulty increaſes when the ſenſe of what originally was delivered in one language, is to be expreſſed in another. Incomprehenſible does not convey to the Engliſh reader the idea of *immenſus*; and *eſſence* might probably have been more proper, or leſs liable to miſconſtruction, than *ſubſtance*, as the latter may appear to ſome to carry with it an idea of materialiſm. If it be ſaid that men in general know nothing of the errors alluded to, that many of them are forgotten or diſregarded, and that peaceable minds ought not to be perplexed, we may anſwer, that it is perfectly conſonant to the nature of all elementary inſtruction, to ſtate negatively, what

is

is not to be maintained, and positively what is; and that he, who adheres to the affirmative part, virtually renounces the negative.

The learned can read the Scriptures in the original language; they can consult the annals of the Church; they can trace out every sect to it's original founder. They can, except in cases of gross contradiction and absurdity, give regular and consistent accounts of each, they can see the dangers to which others have been exposed; but, with respect to a particular knowledge of the doctrine of the Trinity, what great difference is there between the learned and the unlearned? *Canst thou by searching, find out the Almighty? Verily he is a God, that hideth himself.* Now, admitting that some part of this Creed is calculated only for more improved understandings, the less enlightened part of Christians can leave out what is minute, and acquiesce in general terms. And from the very nature of the institution, this confession of Faith is deemed of less general use than the Nicene and the Apostles' Creed, upon both of which it may be considered as a comment.

As the essential points inculcated in all are the same, it is difficult to say how he who disbelieves

diſbelieves one ſhould not diſbelieve another. The truth is, that Unitarians, Arians, and Socinians, will be content with nothing ſhort of an univerſal renunciation of the whole doctrine of the Trinity; and, in the mean time, feel great indignation to be excluded from miniſtring in holy things. Some, indeed, have been admitted into the miniſtry upon conditions which they themſelves openly and avowedly diſapprove. The pretence of performing ſubſtantial ſervice to the Church is alledged in their vindication. But ſuch a pretence is an inſtance of vanity and folly. It is an inſtance of vanity, to ſuppoſe that, after ſo much has been written, and when ſo many perſons of real knowledge are daily admitted to the ſacred function, the adherence of a few individuals to the paſtoral care ſhould be of ſo much importance. Without diminiſhing their number, or depreciating their abilities, *great*, and, we truſt, ſucceſsful, would be the *company of preachers*, notwithſtanding their departure. It is an inſtance of folly to ſuppoſe that their flock have ſuch a peculiar veneration for them. For what ought to be imagined concerning thoſe who can enter the Holy Temple, and offer ſupplications to God the Son, and God the

Holy Ghoſt, and yet diſbelieve them to be objects of adoration? Is not the ſin of hypocriſy and duplicity aggravated, when committed in the more immediate preſence of him, *unto whom all hearts be open, all deſires known, and from whom no ſecrets are hid?* Can ſuch perſons be real objects of veneration amongſt the people? Neither rectitude of morals in other reſpects, if it can exiſt under ſuch equivocation, nor ſuperority of talents, will preſerve them from cenſure. Moderate abilities, joined with an honeſt heart, will do more real ſervice among the ignorant than the moſt brilliant powers diſgraced by ſingularity and moroſeneſs. Much more conſiſtent and much more praiſe worthy was the conduct of thoſe, who ſeceded from the Church, when it's Articles and Liturgy were no longer ſatisfactory. Let others of the ſame ſentiments profit, in the true ſenſe of profiting, by ſuch examples; let them ſecure a good name, which is better than riches, by a manly reſignation of that which they cannot retain with honour, when they condemn the terms upon which it was firſt conferred.

The ſtatute which inflicts a penalty, upon ſuch as ſhall be convicted of preaching openly againſt

againſt the doctrine of the Trinity, has not only loſt all it's terror, and all it's force, but is ſarcaſtically ſaid to be the only argument of which we are in poſſeſſion. So grateful is the return made for more than legal toleration. We fear no enquiry, we wiſh to ſilence the gainſayer more by argument than by proceeding even to the juſt extent of our power. The experience of paſt times, and of the preſent, has taught us, that ſome men would become famous even under lawful Animadverſion, who might otherwiſe mix with the maſs of their fellow creatures, and be forgotten. At the ſame time, ſuch perſons, whatever name they aſſume, would have had no reaſon to complain, if, while they are allowed to pray to God the Father *only*, they ſhould be reſtrained by the Civil Magiſtrate from ſpeaking irreverently of the Son and Holy Ghoſt. Common gratitude and common decency require modeſty and reſerve from them. And in order that we may not on this ſubject even *appear* to be carried to an extremity of zeal, a ſtrong and appoſite illuſtration may be adduced in our favour. Perhaps there is no doctrine of the Church of Rome which Proteſtants have more uniformly oppoſed than that of Tranſubſtantiation. We are called

upon to diſavow the belief of it in the moſt particular manner, when we renew our engagements of fidelity and allegiance to our Sovereign. What ſhould we think of a Proteſtant, reſiding and protected in a Popiſh country, if he ſhould treat the Hoſt with open contempt? To ridicule or inveigh againſt an error which he could not remove would be unavailing; to give diſguſt to a people, under whoſe guardianſhip, perhaps under whoſe courteſy and hoſpitality, he lives in ſatisfaction and ſecurity, would argue a perverſion of mind more fatal to true Chriſtianity than the greateſt ſpeculative error.

But why, it is often ſaid, are we ſo zealous in enforcing doctrines merely ſpeculative? The anſwer is, we believe them to be inculcated in Scripture, eſſential to the Chriſtian Religion, and not merely ſpeculative. The Son and the Holy Ghoſt are each of them ſaid to be ſent by the Father, each of them contributes to the great work of our ſalvation. To refuſe them divine honour is unqueſtionably to deny their divine power. And who ſhall expect benefit from the exertions of that power which he denies? Who ſhall receive that aſſiſtance for which he diſdains to ſupplicate?

plicate? We do not preſume to fix limits to divine mercy. But ſurely we always endanger our title to it, when we reject the conditions upon which it is granted. The humble Chriſtian hopes for no benefit from the Goſpel Covenant, but from a firm reliance on the merits of his Saviour, and the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Chriſtianity receives additional importance, and commands additional reverence, from the dignity of it's Author. So much may be concluded from the Parable of the Huſbandmen, and from the beginning of the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, * *And if the word ſpoken by Angels was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received a juſt recompence of reward; How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great a ſalvation, which at the firſt began to be ſpoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God alſo bearing them witneſs, both with ſigns and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, according to his own will.*

Humility is enforced by the wonderful humiliation of Chriſt. Abhorrence of ſin increaſes in proportion to the value of the ran-

* Heb. ii. v. 2, 3, 4.

ſom required for its expiation. Our conviction of the neceſſity of ſuch an expiation depends upon the abſolute certainty of it's having been offered and accepted, Are we in diſtreſs? Our aſſurance of the love of God is increaſed by the great event which he brought about in Bethlehem. †*Scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man ſome would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us in that while we were yet ſinners, Chriſt died for us.* **He that ſpared not his own ſon, but delivered him up for us all, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us all things?* Were the Socinian doctrine true, the force of ſuch reaſoning would vaniſh. Nor would our bleſſed Lord, after having aſſumed peculiar authority, and accepted peculiar appellations, be a perfect pattern of humility. His claims of preeminence, enforced by the predictions of the Prophets, and the preaching of his Apoſtles, would eventually tend to his degradation, and their diſhonour. They would be found falſe witneſſes.

From what has been ſaid, it is hoped that every true friend of Chriſtianity will receive

† Rom. v. 7, 8, * Rom. viii. 32.

the

the articles of faith, contained in this Creed, with deference and godly fear, not as deriving their authority from the will of man, but from the Word of God. Let him ever remember, that though no rubrick be inſerted for the purpoſe, yet we are warranted by reaſon and common ſenſe to affirm what was once intended to be declared by a rubrick, "That "the condemning clauſes are to be under-"ſtood as relating to thoſe, who obſtinately "deny the ſubſtance of the Chriſtian Faith." The Creed had a very general reception among Eaſtern and Weſtern Churches. And, to uſe the words of it's accurate Hiſtorian, "may it ever continue in full force, till the "Chriſtian Churches can find out (which "they will not eaſily do) a juſter, or "ſounder, or more accurate, form of faith "than this is." And may he, *who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of ſinful men, evermore keep us ſtedfaſt in this faith,* through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, world without end.

# SERMON VI.

NUMB. XVI. Part of the 11th Verſe.

THOU AND ALL THY COMPANY ARE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD.

NOTHING has created greater contention between the Sectaries and ourſelves than proper modes of Chriſtian Worſhip. They ſeem to wage perpetual war againſt every part of our inſtitution; againſt our temples, our ceremonies, our veſtments; againſt preſcribed forms of prayer in general, and againſt the Common Prayer in particular. It is intended, in the following diſcourſe, to anſwer their moſt formidable objections.

And firſt, let us conſider their objections againſt our temples, our ceremonies, and our veſtments.

veſtments. Theſe are invidiouſly ſaid to be the inventions and ordinances of man. A confeſſion that they are can be no argument againſt their propriety and utility. Why ſhould man be blamed for regulating that which is evidently left in his power? Matters of ornament or decency require no abſtruſe reaſoning, no laborious inveſtigation, much leſs do they require the aid of inſpired penmen; and, if ſome ſmall deference be paid to the prejudices of the people, there can be no juſt cauſe of complaint. But if no diſtinction between the primitive times and the darker ages, or between the darker ages and our own, be attended to, if the uſe muſt be confounded with the abuſe, every argument we can bring will be ſuperfluous. Should enquiry be made where we will fix the boundary, it is obvious that in things commonly called indifferent, but only ſo called in oppoſition to eſſentials, an exact boundary is not neceſſary to be fixed; and no moderate man would depart from a Church merely upon the ſuppoſition of her retaining more externals than he heartily approves. No ſociety could act collectively with harmony and efficacy, if individuals did not give way in things

things of ſmaller moment. * Indeed, many wiſe and good men, little inclined to vexatious animadverſion, or uncharitable cenſure, have been of opinion that ſomewhat more of the Romiſh ritual, or of outward decoration, might have been retained without injury to religion. An attachment to ceremonies was objected with much malignity and invective againſt a Prelate of the laſt century, who died a ſacrifice to that intolerance, from which, in the days of his power, he had not been entirely free. Happy would it have have been for this kingdom, if his judgment had never erred more than in the ceremonious conſecration of a Church, or in giving additional ſplendour to the worſhip of the Almighty.

Various are the methods by which popularity has been acquired. Sometimes auſterity and mortification, ſometimes, on the contrary, an attempt to reconcile religion and ſenſuality together, has led to reputation and pre-eminence. None of the leaſt faſcinating arts is that by which the pride of man is flat-

* Wida, Archbiſhop of Cologn, was deſirous of retaining all the religious ceremonies of the Church of Rome which were not impious. His plan moſt reſembled that of England. Bayle's Dictionary.

tered,

tered, by which he is placed above his real ſtate and condition, and inveſted, as it ſhould ſeem, with greater dignity and honour. An unwary perſon may be captivated by the following kind of reaſoning. "Conſider that "thy tabernacle of clay muſt ſhortly be put "off, and that the more thou abſtracteſt thy-"ſelf from earthly objects during thy conti-"nuance here, the better wilt thou be pre-"pared for that ſpiritual life which thou art "to lead hereafter. The vanity of man im-"poſes religious rites and ceremonies, and the "authority even of Jeſus Chriſt himſelf is al-"ledged in his defence. But knoweſt thou "not, that where there is a ſpiritual mean-"ing, the ſymbols or tokens, which expreſs "that ſpiritual meaning, are nothing of them-"ſelves but lifeleſs matter, and may there-"fore be done away? As well mighteſt thou "think that the feet of the diſciples are to be "waſhed, as that the laſt ſupper is to be re-"preſented by bread and wine. And what is "Baptiſm but the purification of the inward "man? Canſt thou think that the ſprinkling "of water ſhould be at all effectual in taking "away ſin? How ſtrange were it, after God "hath commanded us to worſhip him *in ſpi-*"*rit and in truth*, if that worſhip be diſguiſed

"by

" by ſplendid and glittering appearances? *Is*
" *not heaven his throne? Is not earth his foot-*
" *ſtool?* What houſe ſhall be made ſuitable
" to His majeſty, who hath himſelf created
" all things? Let His temple be fixed in the
" the hearts of His people. *Be thyſelf the*
" *altar, the ſacrifice, and the prieſt.*" All theſe ſentiments are too elevated for our preſent weakneſs and infirmity. We cannot diveſt ourſelves of a regard to appearances; and they beſt know our frame, who have condeſcended to the prejudices of the outward man, without forgetting the edification and improvement of the inward.

It were eaſy to prove that the caſe of the two Sacraments, and that of waſhing the feet of the diſciples, are altogether different. By the Sacraments we are made partakers of all the benefits of the Chriſtian covenant, we engage to believe all the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith, and to practiſe every chriſtian virtue. Thus much is allowed by all Chriſtians; and to us who believe Chriſt to have been a full, perfect, and ſufficient ſacrifice, they adminiſter peculiar conſolation. But what was our Lord's intention in waſhing the feet of his diſciples? To exemplify the virtue of humility,

mility, which may be exemplified by any other inſtance of benevolent condeſcenſion. The repreſentation of this inſtruction by an Act, though founded upon too literal an interpretation, is continued in the Church of Rome without any glaring impropriety. The awfulneſs of the Scene which it calls to remembrance, is increaſed by the artleſs ſimplicity with which St. John has deſcribed it. Of externals in general we can only ſay, that exceſs ſhould be avoided, that in our Church it has been avoided, that our ceremonies are few and expreſſive, that our veſtments are ſuited to the nature of the ſacred function, that in all important offices it is neceſſary to diſtinguiſh between the individual and the publick character he ſuſtains, that ſome of the Diſſenters have acknowledged the uſe of ſacerdotal habits, by partly adopting them, and that the leſs we aſſimilate the outward circumſtances of worſhip to the outward circumſtances of common life, the greater reverence we ſhall expreſs in the congregation of the faithful. If muſick, if any other of the fine arts, can add to our devotion, without drawing our attention and affection from Him who is to us all in all, why ſhould they be deſpiſed or rejected? What aſſiſted and animated a

Jew

Jew may ſurely animate a Chriſtian. The harp and the cymbal accompanied the Songs of Sion. But as the uſe of them was not enjoined by the ceremonial law, ſo neither can the abrogation of the one be concluſive for the abrogation of the other. To alledge that muſick excites more curioſity than piety is to argue from the abuſe, and the reaſoning, if worthy attention at all, would be partly valid againſt ſpiritual inſtruction in Churches. In fact, though the love of novelty or of variety be too predominant, yet it does not altogether exclude better motives, even in its moſt unjuſtifiable uſurpation, and he who entered the Houſe of God with little purpoſe of being made a better Chriſtian, may return from it with unexpected zeal, and almoſt involuntary impreſſions. Without an inward call, his mind may be thoroughly affected, though, like the angry Conqueror of the Liberties of Rome, in the caſe of Ligarius, he thought himſelf unintereſted in the ſubject matter, and only wiſhed for eloquence and harmony.

To conſecrate places for publick worſhip, is to confer no inherent ſanctity upon thoſe places, and the Almighty is only ſaid, by a figure, to be more immediately preſent in them, be-

cauſe

cauſe he is, or ought to be, more immediately preſent to our minds. We are ſuppoſed to have left our worldly cares and worldly diſtinctions behind us; outward reverence itſelf is nothing, unleſs it expreſs and increaſe inward humility.

The objections againſt preſcribed forms of prayer in general, and againſt the Common Prayer in particular, are now to be conſidered.

Preſcribed forms of prayer have every ſanction which long uſage in the Jewiſh and the Chriſtian Church can give them, they have the ſanction of our Lord himſelf. They are are attended with many advantages to the people, who knowing beforehand what petitions they are to offer up, and having no deſire of novelty to be gratified, can apply themſelves without diſtraction to the ſeveral duties of publick worſhip. If inſpiration be pretended to, we can only ſay that the effects muſt enable us to judge of ſuch pretenſions. It is little ſhort of blaſphemy to aſcribe to the ſuggeſtion of the Spirit what is frequently futile and abſurd, or, if rational, is premeditated.

But want of variety is frequently inſiſted upon. Let men baniſh from religion the gratification

tification of ignorance and caprice. Let them in this, and in all other inſtances, firmly withſtand, and endeavour to overcome, abſurd prejudices. If the recurrence of the ſame ſervice be ſo extremely offenſive, why may we not wiſh for *another ſun to rule the day, and other ſtars to govern the night?* * Why affect a change in words when the

* If you ſtill think the variation of the phraſe is ſo mighty a matter, let us try it, if you pleaſe, in one or two inſtances. We, in the confeſſion of our ſins to Almighty God, conſtantly ſay, "We have offended againſt thy holy laws." You perhaps ſay at one time, We have deſpiſed thy commandments, at another time, We have committed iniquity, and at a third, We have done amiſs, and dealt very wickedly. We ſue for pardon, and reſtoration to the divine favour, ſaying, "reſtore thou "them that are penitent." You, it may be, ſay now, forgive us all our ſins, which we truly and ſincerely repent of; then, We confeſs our wickedneſs, and are ſorry for our ſin, do thou forgive it: and the next time, perhaps, uſe other words of the ſame import; returning, after a proper time, to the firſt expreſſions, which I take to be one of the ſecrets of extempore prayer. Is it now poſſible for you to think that the attention of any ſerious man will depend upon his uſing conſtantly one of theſe forms, or interchangeably, the other? If it be ſo, it is a ſign he is not much wearied with the burden of his ſins, nor very ſollicitouſly concerned about the forgiveneſs of them.

You will aſk, perhaps, if I ſhould not myſelf be weary of a Sermon, though it were ever ſo good, a hundred times repeated. To be ſure, ſir, I ſhould; but the caſes are widely different. I ſhould be weary of a ſermon ſo often repeated, becauſe, being ſtale, I ſhould be no longer entertained with it, or becauſe, having ſo often heard it, it would teach me nothing new, but what it had taught me long and many times before. But when I go to *prayers*, I do not propoſe to myſelf entertainment, or information, or inſtruction, as your people generally ſeem

ſubject matter continues the ſame? Where the love of variety could be gratified without inconvenience, care has been taken to indulge it. Different pſalms and different portions of ſcripture, together with various tranſitions from one act of devotion to another, are a ſufficient relief to a rational mind.

The Liturgy is ſometimes charged with tautology, and we are forbidden, ſay our adverſaries, by our Lord himſelf, to *uſe vain repetitions*. The Phariſees entertained unworthy notions of the Almighty, as if the efficacy of prayer depended upon it's continuance, and as if the Almighty were to be prevailed upon by mere ſhew, or importunity. But ſurely all repetitions are not vain. The Poet and the Orator will convince us of the

to do. They ſeem to regard a prayer with the ſame attention they do a ſermon, and they expect from the one the ſame ſort of inſtruction or entertainment that they look for from the other; which the perpetual repetition of the ſame prayer not affording, they are diſguſted at it, and naturally fall into a drowſy inattention to it. Whereas, if they would lay aſide all expectation of having their judgments informed, or their imaginations entertained and diverted by the prayers of the Church, and look for nothing in them beſides a repreſentation of the real wants and deſires of a Chriſtian to Almighty God, in proper and ſuitable expreſſions, the frequent rehearſal of them would not be ſuch a wearineſs, and they would join in them with great devotion and delight. White's Letter to a Gentleman diſſenting from the Church of England, p. 38, 39.

contrary

contrary, whenever they wiſh to impreſs any idea more ſtrongly. Muſick has it's popular ſtrains, which, however frequently they occur, are heard with increaſing pleaſure. In many of our amuſements, which are ſuppoſed to attract by gratifying our fondneſs for novelty, there is a reiteration of the ſame incidents, a fulfilling of the ſame wiſhes. Are truths, then, moſt highly intereſting to the ſons of men, leſs proper to be frequently inculcated, leſs neceſſary to be carefully remembered? The repetition of the Lord's Prayer, though occaſioned by the union of ſervices once uſed ſeparately, is a conſtant admonition of the wiſdom and goodneſs of our bleſſed Maſter, and a check to the leaſt preſumption and confidence in our own performances.

The chief end of all our ſervices, as of our exiſtence itſelf, is the glory of God, who wills the happineſs of all his creatures. The doxology repeated cauſes this primary purpoſe to be uppermoſt in our thoughts, and every new ſubject gives additional animation to the ſame form of praiſe.

The ſolemn invocations for mercy from the three perſons in the ever bleſſed Trinity have a ſameneſs of words, but a diſtinction

of ſignification. We are taught by the Chriſtian Religion to hope for different bleſſings from each, and that hope naturally ſuggeſts appropriated petitions. In ſhort, no cenſure is applicable to any repetitions in the Liturgy, which is not applicable to the choruſes of the Pſalms themſelves.

In the courſe of our Services we ſupplicate more than once for all orders and degrees of men, in their publick and private capacities; but though the objects be the ſame, the matter of our prayers is diverſified. The leading idea is perhaps the ſame, a general expreſſion will comprehend ſucceeding particulars. The ſuffrages are a compendium of all that we can requeſt. That compendium is naturally dilated in the following prayers. We have variety, but not without ſome degree of reſemblance.

Our Services have now and then been cenſured in reſpect to their duration. Some think them too ſhort, others too tedious, which is a preſumptive proof at leaſt that we have kept the path of moderation. It is not granted to any man to define with preciſion what portion of time is requiſite for the pub-

lick

lick and private worſhip of God. One of the well known errors of darker ages, not altogether renounced in the preſent day, was to relinquiſh the ſubſtantial purpoſes of life, and to reſiſt, in many inſtances, the reaſonable demands of nature for the ſake of adhering to the offices of devotion. Whereas it is clear, from the preſent conſtitution of things, that labour of ſome kind or other is neceſſary to the whole human race, that the portions of time required for the immediate ſervice of the Almighty are very ſmall when compared with the whole; that ſuch ſervice, when properly attended to, indicates and improves a good diſpoſition, but does not conſtitute real goodneſs, is a preparation for a ſpiritual conteſt, a putting on of our ſpiritual armour. But alas! with too many it is the reſource of idleneſs or hypocriſy. How often do we ſee the eyes and the hands lifted up to Heaven, while the heart is fixed upon earthly objects? * We have heard of days, in which men faſted and *prayed for ſtrife and debate, and to ſmite with the fiſt of wickedneſs*. We know many who addreſs the ſupreme Being with uncommon warmth and perſeverance, who are diveſted of common honeſty. What are

* Iſaiah 58.

the prayers and Thankſgivings of ſuch men, but the *ſacrifices of fools*, of whom we may affirm, that the more they offer the more they offend? Yet ſuch men are often diſſatisfied with the daily Service of the Church, and repair to unhallowed places of abſurd worſhip to ſupply the ſeeming deficiency. Others, ill affected to religion, comparing this ſhew of ſanctity with it's diſgraceful and pernicious fruits, either conclude that the advantages of aſſembling together are more ſpecious than real, or become impatient under the continuance of prayers and praiſes, which, calculated as they are to improve morality, have, through perverſeneſs, tended to it's annihilation and have uſurped it's place. After all, they who complain of the tediouſneſs of the Liturgy, have reaſon to ſuſpect their own lukewarmneſs, and they who pronounce it too conciſe may, by meditation in private, ſupply what they think is wanting: but let them ever diſtinguiſh real piety from puritanical moroſeneſs, let them be at the greateſt diſtance from ſuppoſing that to be the end which is only the means.

The power of abſolving was evidently granted to the miniſters of Chriſt. From it's abuſes

abuſes in the Church of Rome, it has been the ſubject of ridicule or invective. But whatever the form may be, it is declaratory of the mercy of God upon the expreſs condition of ſincere repentance. The Greek Church well explains the meaning of all our forms by the following words, "* The Lord pardon you "by me his unworthy ſervant." The King of Heaven deals with us after the manner of earthly kings. He commiſſions his embaſſadors to aſſure us of his mercy and loving kindneſs. But he alone can give validity to their ſentence, becauſe he alone knows whether we have performed the conditions upon which it is pronounced.

We are cenſured for praying to be delivered from ſudden death, becauſe, ſay our adverſaries, it can only be a real evil by our own perverſeneſs. Were this objection of any force, it would lead us to omit all kinds of depravity, it would be concluſive againſt the practice of good men in all ages, and under all diſpenſations, who have requeſted aſſiſtance from Heaven to reſiſt the allurements of vice. And to pray againſt the *effect* of imprudence and ſupineneſs were but virtually

* Sparrow's Rationale, p. 25.

praying againſt the cauſe. But the truth is, ſudden death is here conſidered as a temporal or worldly calamity, and we pray that no folly, no temerity of our own, no malice of our fellow creatures, no accident, which might have been prevented or avoided, may remove us from the *land of the living* before our appointed time. He, who hath implanted in us the principle of ſelf preſervation, He, who hath given efficacy to ſo many modes of prolonging life, authorizes us to hope that He will not be offended if we ſhould ſupplicate for *length of days*. It was held out as a bleſſing to the Jews, it is held out to Chriſtians as an inferior motive to prudence and induſtry, as a check to intemperance and prodigality: It is often more deſireable for the ſake of thoſe committed to our immediate care and protection, than for our own. Sudden death has brought with it calamities which could neither be prevented nor foreſeen, has created litigations of which remote poſterity may have felt the effects, has precluded the execution of many laudable purpoſes, and has deſtroyed the exertion of exalted talents. It may, therefore, be juſtly deprecated, even from a regard to the publick good, and the general intereſt of mankind. Preſumption is

effectually

effectually prevented by the aſſurance that the moſt adverſe circumſtances may be turned to our advantage, and that we aſk for nothing but as far as *it may be expedient for us.*

Of Infant Baptiſm, which has created ſo much controverſy, it may be proper to ſpeak more particularly. The various and vague notions concerning Original Sin have been treated with ridicule by the adverſaries of Chriſtianity, and much more has been aſſerted by our own advocates than Scripture will warrant. It is a ſafe and wholeſome doctrine to aſſert in general terms that man in his natural ſtate is liable to the wrath of God, that he is weak and helpleſs, that without the preventing and co-operating Grace of God he can do nothing. *To be born in ſin* is a forcible expreſſion, ſignifying innate propenſity to ſin; *to be born in the wrath of God,* is to be born with all thoſe imperfections, and under all thoſe melancholy circumſtances, which are the unavoidable puniſhment of Adam's tranſgreſſion. Of the fate of thoſe who die unbaptized it is ſuperfluous to enquire. But to place the helpleſs infant by prayer under the protection of the Almighty is a charitable and an edifying practice. Perhaps, from the general

neral command for baptiſm, no poſitive, no inconteſtable argument can be adduced in our favour. "Whether baptiſm (ſays the * Author of the Irenicum) "ſhall be adminiſtered "to infants or no, is not ſet down in expreſs "words, but left to be gathered by analogy "and conſequences; what manner it ſhall be "adminiſtered in, whether by dipping or "ſprinkling, is not abſolutely determined; "what form of words to be uſed, whether in "the name of all three perſons, or ſometimes "in the name of Chriſt only, as in the Acts "we read (if that be the ſenſe, and not ra-"ther in Chriſt's name, i. e. by Chriſt's au-"thority;) whether ſprinkling or dipping "ſhall be thrice, as ſome Churches uſe it, or "only once, as others; theſe things, we "ſee, as relating to an ordinance of divine "inſtitution, are yet paſſed over without "any expreſs command, determining either "way, in Scripture." An injunction for making diſciples, ſtrictly ſpeaking, implies a capacity of being inſtructed. But we find that Infant Baptiſm prevailed in the Church from the beginning; and ſo much is clear from the Goſpel itſelf, that our Saviour

* Stillingfleet's Irenicum, p. 178.

thought

thought children worthy his care and attention, that he rebuked his diſciples for thinking otherwiſe; that, as he informs us in another paſſage, * *their angels do always behold the face of his Father, which is in heaven*, which expreſſion muſt imply peculiar favour and protection. Nothing can be alledged againſt Baptiſm which is not equally forcible againſt circumciſion. But were the cuſtom ever ſo abſurd, all its abſurdity is removed by the Rite of Confirmation, wherein are ratified all the promiſes and engagements made at our baptiſm.

Other conſiderations will vindicate our practice. He who introduces his children into the congregation of the faithful, enters into an engagement that he will bring them up in the *nurture and admonition of the Lord*, that he will, to the utmoſt of his power, make them undefiled members of Chriſt's body. The whole office for baptiſm is replete with inſtruction to thoſe who attend it; the words of reception are particularly ſtrong and expreſſive; no miniſter can pronounce them, no attentive chriſtian can hear them,

* Matt. xviii.

without

without emotion, without reanimated courage. A ſtrong argument for Infant Baptiſm may be drawn from reaſon and from fact. Whenever the ſpiritual life begins, then ought to begin our ſupplications for grace, which, like the refreſhing dew upon the tender plant, ſhall give life and vigour to thoſe infant virtues which are diſcovered at a very early age. How ſoon do we find affection and gratitude, how ſoon, by accurate obſervation, do we diſcern thoſe propenſities, which conſtitute a ſtriking and characteriſtick diſtinction thro' life? They who have been moſt minute in their directions for the proper management of children, have expreſſed well grounded apprehenſions concerning their morals from the very moment of their birth, and have condemned, with juſt acrimony, the practice of thoſe who remove them from their natural protectors, to vice, meanneſs, or folly. It were ſtrange, therefore, if a Chriſtian were leſs ſollicitous about the morals of his child than ſome Heathens have been; or if, while he is uſing every obvious, every prudential, method to preſerve them untainted, he ſhould not implore the bleſſing of providence upon all his endeavours. It would be ſtrange to ſuppoſe that He, by whom we have been holden

holden up ever ſince we were born, ſhould not at leaſt be as attentive to our ſpiritual as our temporal welfare.

We have been often accuſed of preſumptuouſly aſſerting, in the Funeral Service, that the deceaſed perſon is advanced to a ſtate of happineſs and glory. But the phraſe of "taking unto himſelf" means no more than removing out of this world, and the body is committed to the ground under a general hope of a reſurrection to eternal life. When they who die by their own act are committed under the ſame form, it ſhould be conſidered, that a tribunal, from which we cannot appeal, has previouſly, however erroneouſly, declared it to be the act of God, the act of a diſordered underſtanding. In this, and many other inſtances, it is ſafe to incline to the charitable ſide of the queſtion. In doubtful caſes, we have no right to enquire by what degree of imprudence the life of a deceaſed perſon was ſhortened, by what means it might have been prolonged: nor ought we to hope otherwiſe than that the greateſt ſinner may find acceptance with God. We know not with what earneſtneſs he may have prayed for forgiveneſs, we know not with what ſincerity he may have repented.

Concerning

Concerning *the accompliſhment of the number of the Elect*, as nothing has been revealed, ſo perhaps we might have been ſilent. And yet there is no wiſh to confine the mercy of God to a ſmaller number than that which he hath deſtined to eternal life. The very expreſſion implies a completion of what is already decreed. And ſurely, every Chriſtian conſidering the cares, the temptations, the vanities, of this ſinful world, may ardently wiſh *for new Heavens and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs*. Surely he may pant after that happineſs which is the end of his exiſtence, the reward of his obedience.

To object againſt the perpetual uſe of occaſional pſalms and hymns, is to condemn the conſtant practice of the Jewiſh and the Chriſtian Church, and is above all things frivolous and captious. That ſimilar circumſtances ſhould create ſimiliar emotions, and that whatever is not applicable to our condition may yet tend to our edification, is the general principle of incorporating ſcripture into our ſervices. Inſpiration adds weight and ſolemnity, commands reverence ſuperior to all human compoſitions. Hiſtorical or prophetical alluſions inform the underſtanding,

ing, while they make a laſting impreſſion upon the heart.

In the Commination-Service, ſo formidable to certain weak minds, we uſurp no power of judging our fellow creatures, we condemn ſin in the abſtract, we condemn ourſelves for having committed it, that we may not finally *be judged of the Lord.*

Perhaps it is more to be wiſhed than expected, that the days appointed for humiliation and faſting might be devoutly obſerved. Such obſervance would contribute to the health of body and ſoul. A liberal and unreſtrained participation of the good things of this life brings on diſeaſe, creates indolence and languor. And yet a total abſtinence, as well as moderate forbearance, is but a ſecondary purpoſe when compared with a ſuſpenſion of amuſements and pleaſures, with a temporary diſcouragement of that diſſipation which the inſtitution of the Chriſtian ſabbath, on many occaſions, inſtead of reſtraining, only tends to increaſe. The truth is, from former uſurpations, the Governors of the Church have loſt all their authority, and the aid of the civil power, whatever reproachful names may be

be given to it, is become neceſſary to enforce thoſe ſalutary injunctions, which are more of a ſpiritual than a temporal kind. If power can be exerciſed with wiſdom and with efficacy, we ſhould be little ſollicitous in whoſe hand it is placed, and yet we may rejoice to ſee it placed where it will excite the leaſt ſuſpicion.

Time has brought ſome regulations and reſtrictions into diſuſe. Let not the Church be anſwerable for inconveniences which no prudence of man can ever prevent, and let her adverſaries know, that we wiſh to ſilence their cavils by any thing ſooner than by a penal ſtatute. If ſome ſlight alterations in the Leſſons, and in the Matrimonial Service, if a rubrick, explanatory of the real tendency of the Athanaſian Creed, and a leſs frequent repetition of the Lord's Prayer, might prove ſatisfactory, and induce them to unite in one Communion, perhaps our ſuperiors would not be inflexible to theſe moderate conceſſions. But what reaſon is there to think that theſe will be ſufficient? Several experiments have formerly been made without ſucceſs, in order to reconcile diſcordant parties; and to endanger the adherence of our friends by a fruitleſs

fruitleſs attempt to comprehend our enemies, would neither be prudent nor juſt.

The Liturgy comprehends the whole Chriſtian ſyſtem, it inculcates every doctrine and every precept of the Goſpel; it deſtroys every vainglorious thought, and all reliance on our own unaſſiſted endeavours. Every prayer offered up implies that we will, to the utmoſt of our power, promote thoſe good purpoſes which we wiſh to ſee accompliſhed; and as Scripture does not enable us to judge what *degree* of aſſiſtance will be granted us, nor *how* the aſſiſtance is granted, the more humble and the more general our expreſſions are, the better will they agree with the condition of frail and dependent creatures. It is true, indeed, that extreme diffidence might, through human weakneſs, end in ſupine indolence. But, generally ſpeaking, he who knows that all he can do is but little, will endeavour to compenſate, by diligence and perſeverance, what is wanting in ability.

May a due ſenſe of our infirmities *add ſtrength to our faith, and ſerioufneſs to our repentance*; and may that worſhip, which unites together high and low, rich and poor, under

the humiliating but juſt appellation of *vile earth and miſerable ſinners*, gradually purify our hearts from every ſinful inclination, from every thought which exalteth itſelf againſt God, to whom, with the Son and Holy Ghoſt, be all honour and glory, now and forever. Amen.

SERMON

# SERMON VII.

## ROM. XVI. 17.

NOW I BESEECH YOU, BRETHREN, MARK THEM WHICH CAUSE DIVISIONS AND OFFENCES CONTRARY TO THE DOCTRINE WHICH YE HAVE LEARNED, AND AVOID THEM.

TO preſerve us ſtedfaſt and unmoveable in the principles of the Church of England, it may not be improper to take a general view of the miſchiefs of Separation. What allowances the Almighty will hereafter make for weakneſs of underſtanding, or prejudice of education, is not granted us to determine. The condemnation of error implies no uncharitable judgment of individuals. But if the guide be blind, we muſt guard againſt the obvious conſequences of

placing ourſelves under his direction; if the pilot would carry us to rocks and quickſands, it is of little moment, as to our ſafety, whether ignorance or raſhneſs would be the primary cauſe of our ruin.

Of the evils of ſeparation, ſome are chargeable upon Diſſenters in general, and ſome upon particular denominations.

Of the general evils, the firſt and moſt obvious is a breach of Chriſtian unity. And to prevent this the Apoſtles ſeem to have exerted their utmoſt powers, both in preaching and writing; they ſeem to have branded with the ſtrongeſt marks of diſapprobation the contentious and the turbulent. And, indeed, who does not clearly ſee that ſuch a ſpirit is in direct enmity with the true ſpirit of religion? Who does not ſee that the crime of hereſy ariſes from that general murmuring and diſcontent with which it is attended, more than from the immediate object of diſputation? If Chriſtianity owe much of its influence to the firm and collected exertions of numbers, if every religious duty be performed with more animation by ſociety, if the generality of men have neither leiſure nor ability to form

form a ſyſtem for themſelves, and if it be the higheſt preſumption for individuals, even to attempt what no individual could ever execute with tolerable ſucceſs, every Separatiſt ſhould ſeriouſly conſider, whether, upon his own principles, he is not giving up a great advantage to avoid a ſmall inconvenience, eſpecially if he reflect upon another general evil of ſeparation, which is, the triumph it affords to the enemies of our holy Faith. Is this, they exclaim, the boaſted light of revelation! Is this the boaſted perſpicuity of Goſpel precepts! Is this the almoſt irreſiſtible conviction which they are ſaid to create! Are not the Annals of the Church a recital of wars and fightings, of feuds and animoſities, of rapine and extortion, of groſs ſenſuality, or affected auſterity, concealed under the veil, and vindicated under the ſanction, of a peaceable and a pure religion? If Popery have made many Deiſts abroad, Conventicles have not failed to make many at home. Let any thing, however reſpectable, however important in itſelf, once aſſume a ridiculous or contemptible appearance, and a ſuperficial obſerver will be immediately diſguſted; he will expect nothing valuable where the dictates of reaſon and common ſenſe are notoriouſly violated. When the bias is already on

the ſide of infidelity, the moſt trivial circumſtance will tend to increaſe it. Ridicule, ſo far from being a teſt of truth, is frequently a great ſupport of falſehood; it is apt to engage and confine the attention to the ſurface of things, it ſometimes dazzles the mental eye, ſometimes miſplaces or disfigures the object of contemplation. He, who can employ it with ingenuity and ſucceſs, is conſtantly in ſearch of matter, and ſeldom diſtinguiſhes between thoſe ſmaller foibles which may afford it proper exerciſe, and thoſe greater enormities which cannot be thought of without horror. The two great Satyriſts of Rome have pointed out this neceſſary diſtinction, and the preference given to the earlier of them ariſes from an inattention to the ſubject matter of their cenſure.

But what ſhall be thought of thoſe who excite ridicule, when they profeſs to create ſerioufneſs? Do they not cauſe our common good to be evil ſpoken of? Do they not deſtroy all that reverence in the worſhip of God which is indiſpenſably required of frail dependent creatures? Do not they frequently addreſs him, or ſpeak of the ways of his providence, in language that would be offenſive to an earthly ſuperior? He who wiſhes to convince

convince an unbeliever muſt ſpeak the words of ſoberneſs as well as of truth; muſt be peculiarly attentive to the dignity of his ſubject, which has ſo often raiſed human thoughts and human language to a degree of ſublimity never attained by the greateſt writers of Greece and Rome. Beſides the common enemies of religion, we cannot but know that the Romaniſts have argued againſt the propriety of our Reformation from the variety of ſects into which Proteſtants are divided. The induſtrious Authors of the London Caſes have been very explicit on this head; they have pointed out to Diſſenters of every age and every denomination the very great detriment which the common cauſe ſuſtains from vexatious and ill grounded oppoſition. *The threefold cord is not broken*, but it has been often weakened, and many of thoſe who, in common with ourſelves, have been moſt zealous in deſtroying the pretenſions of one infallible guide, have increaſed the abſurdity they undertook to remove, by placing in the breaſt of each individual a monitor incapable of deception.

Revolutions of every kind will weaken ſome parts of an eſtabliſhment. When the

minds of men are heated, even by juſt zeal, the ferment continues for ſome time after the evil is removed, and the abhorrence of one extreme often carries them into the contrary. The abuſe of authority is brought as an argument againſt its uſe; and becauſe men are neither compelled nor terrified into Communion with the Church, they diſdain to be aſſiſted and edified by her in their Chriſtian courſe. Becauſe her miniſters were deprived of part of their revenue under the *pretence* of Reformation, they therefore conclude that the remaining part may be diverted into any channel, which a mean, mercenary, or innovating ſpirit ſhall dictate. Well may the Romaniſt deride or inveigh againſt the Monarch, who, from his oppoſition to Papal power, has been remembered with that gratitude which he never merited, when they find that Proteſtants can ſo abſurdly confound robbery and reformation together, when they diſcover much policy, but no appearance of juſtice, when the publick is receiving as little real utility from the preſent Lay poſſeſſors of religious houſes, as our anceſtors did from thoſe, who were diſplaced. Not to mention the great allowances which ought to be made for the difference of times, and how unjuſt it

is

is to appropriate to any claſs of men that guilt which they participated in common with their fellow creatures.

Divine right either to power or to revenue is very juſtly exploded by the Miniſters of Chriſt. Whatever they poſſeſs is eſtabliſhed upon the ſame foundation with the poſſeſſions of others; they deſire not to have a ſtronger, and they ought not to have a weaker. There cannot be a wiſer or more advantageous meaſure than that the Legiſlature ſhould from time to time ſtrengthen their juſt influence, and act as their auxiliaries, inaſmuch as the morals of the riſing generation depend greatly upon their exertions, and they have few enemies who are not enemies to real religion. If our Jeruſalem were at unity with herſelf, if *her inhabitants all ſpake the ſame thing, if there were no diviſions among them and they were perfectly joined together in the ſame mind and in the ſame judgment*, the general intereſt of Chriſtianity would daily be improved; blaſphemy, ridicule, and invective would have as little ſucceſs, as they have of real poignancy. Unbelievers would not deſpiſe us, even if they ſhut their ears againſt conviction, and the Church of Rome herſelf would think more favourably

favourably of us in proportion as ſtrife and debate were baniſhed from amongſt us, in proportion as we gained ſtability to our government and worſhip. How far time may effect a re-union is impoſſible to conjecture; the moſt probable means will be to lay aſide former animoſity, and, agreeably to the idea of our firſt Reformers, to imitate whatſoever is uſeful in their inſtitutions, unaffected by invidious appellations, ſome of which are the more offenſive becauſe they are borrowed, and perverted, from ſcripture.

Another general evil of Separation is inſtability. If ſome of the Sectaries have regular forms and confeſſions of faith, there is great reaſon to ſuſpect that theſe forms and confeſſions are not perfectly attended to. Subſcription to a certain number of our Articles, though not abrogated by law, is become obſolete in practice; and many of thoſe, who claim protection under a ſpecifick name and a ſpecifick deſcription, are indulging themſelves in every latitude of opinion, and acknowledge no obligation whatſoever. He, who ſhould enliſt under the banner of ſome of them, would not eaſily find a reſting place; ſo far from it, that the moment he engaged in

in their Communion, he would be told that renunciation of ſyſtem is the leading principle of a Diſſenter, that an unlimited power of judging is the birthright of every Chriſtian, and that the ſlavery of the mind is equally unjuſt and intolerable. But can we ſeriouſly think that they, who hold ſuch language, are, not endeavouring to make proſelytes themſelves? Do they ſpeak or write with a leſs dogmatizing ſpirit than thoſe who inſtruct under an eſtabliſhment? Do they not know that there are many things which the generality of their audience have neither leiſure nor ability to examine?

In many of the ſects there are to be found either no regular articles of faith, or the forms are ſo vague, ſo uncertain, that they admit of no conſiſtent interpretation. Some have ſeparated from their brethren of the ſame denomination upon the ſlighteſt difference, and the ſlighter the difference, the greater has been the animoſity, as if the moſt violent contention ought to ariſe about the ſmalleſt trifles. The ignorance and the variety of teachers have a natural tendency to create doubt and uncertainty in the mind. Every man of underſtanding and diffidence clearly

clearly ſees how hard the taſk is to prevent miſconſtruction and error. But ignorance and preſumption ſhut the eyes againſt every danger and every difficulty. And who ſhall expect edification, much leſs who can hope to be *eſtabliſhed* in the faith, from teachers * *who underſtand not what they ſay, nor whereof they affirm.* ‡ *Behold darkneſs and ſorrow, and the light is darkened in the Heavens thereof,* the bewildered Chriſtian knows not whence he came nor whither he is going. The danger of unſettled notions in religion is frequently pointed out by the ſacred penmen. † *Unſtable as water, thou ſhalt not excel,* fully expreſſes what we ſee exemplified in affairs of much leſs moment than the work of ſalvation. Do not many of the evils of life ariſe from levity and want of reſolution? Have not the nobleſt talents, have not the higheſt attainments, become uſeleſs from inconſtancy? Has not life imperceptibly glided on with many, till the very reſolution which they firſt poſſeſſed, has forſaken them, and they have become the ſport of idleneſs and accident, wanting employment for the preſent hour, and as little ſollicitous concerning the next?

* 1 Tim. i. 7. ‡ Iſaiah v. 30. † Gen. xlix. 5.

Indolence

Indolence often brings on a depreſſion of ſpirits, and he who is once depreſſed is ready to be diſſatisfied with every thing, ſeeks food for diſcontent, and may juſtly be ſaid to prey upon his own vitals. In ſuch a ſtate how many converts have been made by enthuſiaſts! The mind, wearied out by long wandering, ſeeks for quietneſs and repoſe, wherever the proſpect opens, like the fainting traveller, who quenches his thirſt at the firſt ſtream he can find, without any attention to the ſalubrity of the water.

That the religious opinions of many are fortuitous is not to be wondered at: but what is fortuitous ſeldom makes a laſting impreſſion: * *they are ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* ‡ *My people,* ſaith the Lord by his Prophet Jeremiah, *have committed two evils, they have forſaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out ciſterns, broken ciſterns, that can hold no water.* Men are guilty of twofold imprudence; they reject the ſource of real comfort, and then attempt to ſeek it where it never will be found. It is not pretended that

* 2 Tim. iii. 7. ‡ Jer. ii. 13.

authority

authority alone will fix the merits of any eſtabliſhment, but to thoſe who are yet in the labyrinth of error, who like the waves of the ſea are driven about and toſſed, we may aſſert with truth, and in the words of an able defender of our Church ——* "That were "her preſent conſtitutions to be tried by "apoſtolical and primitive practice, her faith "to be judged by that of the firſt centuries, "and four moſt truly general Councils, or "her Liturgy and diſcipline, her rites, ce-"remonies, and way of publick worſhip, to "be compared with what we can collect and "judge of theſe pureſt times; or were ſhe to "ſtand or fall by the judgment of the moſt "able and learned of the Proteſtant divines "abroad ſince the Reformation, ſhe would "not only be juſtified but commended, not "only paſs for a true and ſound part of "Chriſt's Church, but the moſt ſound and "orthodox, the moſt truly primitive and "apoſtolical, of any at this day on the face "of the earth." The approbation or the concurrence of the wiſe and the good of ſo ma-many differentages and periods, if inſufficient to gain proſelytes, may at leaſt be ſome re-

* London Caſes, Vol. I.

medy

medy againſt levity in ourſelves, may add warmth to our zeal, and earneſtneſs to our endeavours, may repreſs in us every deſire of change.

Another general evil of Separation is a contention concerning what are called matters of indifference, which, having neither moral good nor evil in them, required no warrant from Scripture beyond an injunction for the preſervation of decency and order, and which only become important by being ſubſervient to important purpoſes. Controverſy, even upon the moſt eſſential points, is ſeldom followed by conviction: and if poſitive doctrines and commands admit of ſo much diſputation, what ſhall be ſaid of thoſe rites and ceremonies, for the eſtabliſhment of which the Church has only an implied authority? St. Paul appeals to men's natural notions of decorum, and ſilences the contentious with this conciſe declaration, ‡ *We have no ſuch cuſtom, neither the Churches of God.* It is always ſafe to reſt whatſoever is not ſinful upon long and eſtabliſhed uſage. Objects of contention are ſufficiently numerous: the general ſuffrages

‡ 1 Cor. ii.

of

of mankind gradually leſſen them, and often ſhame the moſt litigious into peaceful acquieſcence.

Men little conſider that ſo much attention paid to things of inferior moment, by diſputing their uſe and propriety, creates an indifference to the † *weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.* In the common tranſactions of life, we deem it an argument of a contracted and a mean underſtanding to dwell upon minute circumſtances, or to conſume much time and labour in adjuſting even ſlight inaccuracies. The eye which is very microſcopick is ſeldom very comprehenſive. The Chriſtian who is rich in good works may be compared to the rich § Houſeholder. Minuteneſs concerning trifles would in each of them be meanneſs.

Of the evils chargeable upon particular denominations, none is more fatal than the evil of what we call Enthuſiaſm, that fever of the human mind, which deſtroys its ſober and rational exertions, and gradually weakens its powers by ſuſpending their regular exerciſe. It diſparages the uſe of rea-

† Matth. xxiii. 23. § See Long. S. 33.

ſon

ſon, becauſe it makes converſion to depend upon no regular conviction, upon no diligent examination of Scripture. It overthrows all thoſe beautiful arguments drawn from analogy; it eſtabliſhes ſome viſionary notion concerning Chriſtian Perfection, which either altogether, or in part, contradicts the well-grounded doctrine of a progreſſive ſtate, illuſtrated in the natural as well as in the intellectual world, illuſtrated by every thing without and within us. The inward call, ſo ſudden, ſo unexpected, and ſo eſſential to ſalvation, is deſcribed by no diſtinguiſhing marks, and yet, we are informed, is very eaſily underſtood. It is not altogether irreſiſtible, for the Journals of one of it's greateſt Advocates acquaint us with many Apoſtates.

If Enthuſiaſm diſparage reaſon, we cannot wonder that it ſhould alſo diſparage Learning. St. Paul's obſervations in his firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians concerning the Grecian Philoſophy have been traduced for the purpoſe. Every attainment may puff men up with conceit. The human heart is treacherous, and many things which have the appearance of humility are the effect of pride. It has often been proved, by irreſiſtible arguments, that

Learning in all it's branches is ſubſervient to the intereſt of Religion, and the very exerciſe of the underſtanding upon other uſeful topicks, prepares it to think with greater accuracy and propriety upon the intereſting ſubject of Religion. All our elementary ſtudies may be compared to the prudent and preparatory diſcipline of thoſe who excelled in the Olympick Games: they prediſpoſe as well as qualify; they give alacrity as well as ability. Whoever is conſcious that he is indebted principally to human learning for the power of illuſtrating Scripture, of reading the original tongues, of arranging his matter, of reaſoning upon particular points, of explaining ancient cuſtoms, and even for the very language in which his ideas are clothed, as long as that language is perſpicuous and liberal, is to the higheſt degree unpardonable, if he ſhould either directly or remotely invite to the miniſterial office perſons totally devoid of ſuch qualifications. The plea of neceſſity, if it could ever have been urged with any plauſibility, is at this diſtance of time become frivolous: but indeed, when credulity and vulgarity have taken poſſeſſion of the founders and the leaders, we cannot expect that, in this ſenſe, *the diſciple ſhould be above his maſter.* The talent

talent which was never poſſeſſed is not more uſeleſs than that which is concealed, during ſuch concealment.

But extraordinary inſpiration is ſuppoſed to anſwer every objection, and to ſupply every defect. Common rules of criticiſm are to be exploded as the inventions of men, as hoſtile to the operations of the Holy Spirit, both in the preachers and the hearers of the Word. And ſome well affected to the Church have apprehended that one kind of language is calculated for the improvement of the underſtanding and another for the improvement of the heart. This error has given importance to high ſounding words, and empty declamation. A true critick will analyſe the human mind, and will with the *Author of the Dialogue between Eudoaus and Philanthus, diſcover that nothing will or ought to give laſting pleaſure, which has not truth for it's foundation. It is one thing to dazzle and another to enlighten; it is one thing to alarm, and another to convince. Fictitious ſcenes of joy and ſorrow make an impreſſion upon the mind from a temporary perſuaſion that they are real, from a ſimilarity to real occurren-

* Bouhours.

ces. Permanent effects can only be produced by good and ſubſtantial cauſes; and it is a contradiction in terms, that reaſonable creatures ſhould execute the great purpoſe for which they were created without the conſtant aid of that faculty, which is their characteriſtick diſtinction, the origin and ſource of their dignity and honour.

If what has been ſaid ſhould appear as nothing, becauſe it oppoſes inward conviction, let us appeal to thoſe writings which all parties acknowledge to be inſpired. Have they tranſgreſſed the rules, are they unable to bear the ſcrutiny, of judicious criticiſm? Have not Unbelievers acknowledged and admired their energy and ſublimity? The praiſe of men was no primary conſideration with the firſt preachers of the Goſpel. Subtlety of argument and *oppoſitions of ſcience, falſely ſo called*, were induſtriouſly avoided. Surely every Embaſſador of Chriſt may, after their example, condeſcend to the weak and the ignorant without derogating from the dignity of his embaſſy; he may be zealous without rhapſody, and familiar without vulgarity.

The misfortune is, that enthuſiaſtick teachers

teachers perſuade the world that they are choſen veſſels, that they act under particular communications of grace and favour: the very winds and the rain will ceaſe, the common powers of nature will be enlarged, that admiring multitudes may hear from them, what they are ſuppoſed not to have heard before, the glad tidings of ſalvation. The humble Chriſtian confides in the general care of the Almighty, and is taught by his religion to turn the moſt adverſe events to advantage. But he does not preſume that the courſe of things is perpetually changed for his ſake, even when engaged in the moſt laudable purpoſes. If the ordinary means of preſerving health and ſtrength have been ſucceſsful, he pours forth his ſoul in ſtrains of general thankſgiving to his Creator; but where there is ſo frequently *one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, he dares not alledge ſuch an event as an inſtance of particular kindneſs, as a ſeal of peculiar favour. Much leſs would he impute to the influence of the Holy Spirit, what ſome would ſuſpect to ariſe from malignity of heart, or from a defect of underſtanding, from tranſient heat, or diſordered ſpirits.

The Church of England might entertain

a more favourable opinion of them, if they did not appropriate to themſelves the appellation of true members, or pretend to be faithful auxiliaries. That in a few places, and amongſt a few individuals, they have introduced a ſenſe of religion, where none prevailed before, is not to be denied: But if the ordinary means of inſtruction be neglected, who ſhall be anſwerable for the conſequences? Surely not the Miniſters, but the deſpiſers, of the Word.

In general, their inſtructions are not ſubſidiary, but contradictory to ours, and always carry with them an implied, too often an an open and direct, charge of deficiency in ours. To undermine the foundation of that eſteem, which is neceſſary for the ſucceſs of our labours, to accuſe our very diligence in preparing ſpiritual inſtruction for our flock, as if our endeavours were prophane in proportion as they are conſtant, is productive of evils, which the moſt popular and the moſt prevailing oratory will not compenſate. God forbid that we, any more than they, *ſhould glory, ſave in the Croſs of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, by whom the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world.* But the

ſame

ſame gracious Lord forbid that, in magnifying the merits of redeeming love, we ſhould derogate from the wiſdom and goodneſs of Creation, or imagine that his Son came down from heaven to deſtroy in us any thing but the body of ſin, and the works of the devil. The change intended to be wrought in us is great, and known in Scripture by the figurative and expreſſive title of *a new Creation.*

Another evil, chargeable upon a particular denomination of Chriſtians, is a prepoſterous uſe of the language of Scripture in the common buſineſs of life. Little did our Tranſlators imagine that ſuch a perverſion could ever take place, when they ſtudiouſly avoided vulgar expreſſions, and even technical terms. By ſuch precaution they well knew an habitual reverence for Sacred Writ would be encouraged and promoted, and the diſtinction of ſacred from prophane would be carefully preſerved. With equal propriety might men apply the veſſels of the Sanctuary and the Sanctuary itſelf for the common purpoſes of life, as bring forward the diction of ſublime doctrines and precepts, of intereſting narrative, and pious ſentiments, into worldly buſineſs, and ordinary ſalutation.

With this evil is connected another, namely, an entire renunciation of terms importing reſpect and courteouſneſs. The ſlighteſt obſerver might have diſcovered that the Prophets and Apoſtles were equally careful in expreſſing, according to the uſage of the times, an outward veneration and obeiſance. To ſtifle reſentment, to reſtrain impetuoſity, and to conciliate affection, are the grand purpoſes for which the wiſeſt men have acceded to eſtabliſhed modes, and ſubmitted to ceremonious reſtrictions. Thus we become *all of us ſubject one to another*, and inferiority of ſtation is not excluded from proper deference and regard.

To brand with reproach thoſe profeſſions which are neceſſary for the defence of the nation in general, and of the life, liberty and property of individuals is not leſs an evil in itſelf, becauſe, from the paucity of the communion whence it originates, no actual miſchief is felt. They ſhew ſufficient inclination to enjoy the benefits of extenſive commerce and permanent poſſeſſion, and yet very ungratefully diſparage the means by which thoſe benefits are to be acquired and preſerved, little conſidering that to partake of the fruits of iniquity,

iniquity, would be to partake of iniquity itſelf; and not at all reflecting that to preclude redreſs of flagrant and notorious grievances, is to encourage inſolence, oppreſſion, and injuſtice; that we are almoſt as much indebted to the interpreters, as we are to the firſt framers, of our laws; and that ingenious arguments, followed by judicious deciſions, give ſtability and certainty to many points, which the irremediable imperfection of the laws themſelves has left undecided.

That contention of every kind is carried on with unbecoming rancour, and frequently upon frivolous pretences, cannot be denied. Remedies are allowed for injuries apparently trifling, but thoſe acts which, taken ſingly, are of no conſideration, may become formidable by repetition. One wilful encroachment is perhaps a prelude to many more. The laws ſpeak not the language of revenge but ſecurity; the ſword itſelf is drawn to ſecure the olive branch.

The foregoing ſlight review of the evils ariſing from Separation may tend to confirm our own faith, and increaſe our gratitude to that Church, which keeps us at an equal diſtance

tance from levity and gloomineſs, from deſpair and preſumption, from uncharitable cenſure, and affected candour. With popular prejudices and trite accuſations, with thoſe reflections which one communion of Chriſtians wantonly deliver againſt another, we have no concern.

Nothing can properly create reprehenſion, but that which is openly profeſſed and avowed; nothing ought to be alledged from imperfect ſurmiſe, or remote deduction. Abſurd conſequences may enſue, which men do not foreſee. Long continuance in any perſuaſion reconciles the mind, and eſtabliſhes habitual approbation.

Whatever is good and laudable in any denomination let us ſtudiouſly follow, always remembering that, though not united together in the viſible Church of Chriſt, we have fellowſhip in the inviſible, that we are all heirs of the ſame promiſes, partakers of the ſame grace. May we gradually prepare ourſelves, even during our outward diſunion, for the happy union which we all ſincerely wiſh for *among the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect*.

SERMON

# SERMON VIII.

1 JOHN iii. Part of Verſe 2.

IT DOTH NOT YET APPEAR WHAT WE SHALL BE.

IF what has been already delivered may tend to leſſen mens prejudices againſt the Church of England, if it may ſhorten controverſy, and enforce mutual forbearance, the moſt ſanguine expectations will be fulfilled. There are, however, abuſes under the beſt eſtabliſhment, for which the firſt framers of that eſtabliſhment are not anſwerable. Theſe abuſes increaſe the number of Separatiſts, who, not making the proper diſtinction between our principles and our practice, aſcribe the perverſions of the latter to the imperfections of the former. In taking a review of the

the preſent ſtate of Religion, we ought, with a becoming freedom, and yet without prejudice or malignity, to point out the reigning vices and errors of the age in which we live. After which will be ſubjoined ſome conjectural Remarks upon Prophecies which yet remain to be fulfilled.

And firſt, let us point out the reigning Vices and Errors of the preſent Age.

To compare it with paſt times is neither juſt, neceſſary, nor practicable. It is not juſt, becauſe, if the wiſdom and experience of thoſe who have gone before us have not added both to our knowledge and our goodneſs, we are much worſe than they. It is not neceſſary, becauſe, if we ſhould appear to advantage, the miſconduct of others will be no excuſe for ours. It is not practicable, becauſe the memorials of former times only furniſh us with a few characters, conſpicuous for their virtues or their vices, while the generality were either unknown, or are forgotten. Hiſtorians indeed, of lively imaginations, exhibit what they deem a faithful picture of the moſt barbarous and uncivilized people; they pleaſe the ſuperficial, and they deceive the unwary,

unwary, obſerver. A cool and conſiderate enquirer ſoon diſcovers that the repreſentation is ideal.

That bigotry is every day decreaſing amongſt us, muſt be acknowledged with ſingular ſatisfaction. But let us ſeriouſly aſk ourſelves, whether this boaſted liberality of ſentiment be not owing in many to indifference or lukewarmneſs. Does there not reign amongſt us a general inattention to the offices of religion? Does not every frivolous excuſe keep us from divine worſhip? If we ought not to conſider ourſelves as ſent to reform mankind, would it not at leaſt become us to diſcountenance thoſe who endeavour to overturn religion and morality? If freedom of thinking upon ſpeculative ſubjects be allowed, if falſehood itſelf be beneficial towards the diſcovery of truth, yet ſurely thoſe laws are imperfect, that government is remiſs, which have provided no puniſhment for the avowed and ſhameleſs Advocate of adultery. The diſpenſers of juſtice have been ſufficiently zealous in diſcouraging publications which inflame the minds of the people. Why are they unable to diſcourage thoſe which may corrupt the morals? Our dramatick performances

ances are gradually purifying themſelves. Why ſhould the evil exiſt at all? Why ſhould not root and branch be taken away? The truth is, many glory in their ſhame, and many *care for none of theſe things*. What wonder is it then, if ſome ſerious Chriſtians, diſguſted by ſuch indifference, ſhould join with men of more zeal, and greater ſerioufneſs, who attend more frequently the Houſe of God, and are leſs addicted to diſſipation and pleaſure?

We think it an argument of vexatious oppoſition to refuſe an annual tribute of honour to the Apoſtles, and an annual remembrance of the great and intereſting events of the Goſpel. But does not our practice offer indignity to the ſabbath itſelf? To avoid puritanical ſeverity, do we not ſeek pleaſure, do we not imitate the practice of the Continent, and render that ordinance the means of corruption, which was intended to be the means of animating our piety and ſtrengthening our virtue? The ſalutary laws enacted for the better obſervation of the Lord's day, are little attended to, and but ſeldom executed; and they whoſe time is moſt in their own power are the moſt notorious delinquents. Without

any

any reverence for the ſervice of the Church, without any compaſſion for beaſt or man, they haſten forward to buſineſs or recreation, which might be poſtponed or omitted, or they are wearied out with the tediouſneſs of the day, which yet is accompanied with no painful, no rigorous ſecluſion from rational ſociety.

We cenſure affected ſingularity in language, in apparel, and in the common intercourſe of life. But have we not in conforming to the faſhions of this world conformed alſo to it's follies? Have we not loſt that ſimplicity of life and manners which made many of our anceſtors truly reſpectable, and many of their deſcendants great and opulent? Are not words themſelves become empty ſounds, and often worſe than inſignificant? Amidſt all our complaints of thoſe burdens which an unfortunate war hath brought upon us, is our luxury abated, is our abſtinence greater? Are not they held in much higher eſtimation who contribute to the amuſement, than they who promote the good, of their fellow-creatures? Is not our attention directed more to the ornamental than to the uſeful parts of education? Is not academical life itſelf infected with

with that luxury which has been taught in the days of infancy, and which no ſumptuary laws, no liberal diſcipline can prevent? The ſame complaint exiſted in Rome, and by degrees the Empire was deſtroyed. Have not our very ſtudies a tincture of idleneſs? For, though the value of no performance ought to be eſtimated from its largeneſs, yet true wiſdom muſt often be ſought for, as hid treaſure, and will not be found upon the ſurface. To render religion and learning amiable in the ſight of all men is an indiſpenſable duty, but he who cleanſes the outſide of the cup and platter only, procures momentary praiſe, and incurs laſting reprehenſion.

The decay of chriſtian piety is imputed by popular declaimers to the negligence of the Clergy. As a general charge this is notoriouſly falſe. The inſtructions they adminiſter have been admired by Chriſtians of all denominations and all countries. Many of their productions have been tranſlated into different languages, as replete with edification, and models of compoſition. The generality of them diſdain to ſeek for popularity, by relinquiſhing the path which reaſon and good ſenſe have pointed out. That they cannot adminiſter reproof

reproof with ſucceſs is owing to the corruption of the age. And, indeed, why does every man carry a monitor in his own breaſt, if that monitor, aided by general inſtructions, be inſufficient to guide him in the path of innocence? Can we ſuppoſe that the notorious ſinner is free from many warnings, that he has not many painful apprehenſions of the judgments of God? Nor is it ſo much the fear of man's diſpleaſure that ſtops the mouth of the conſcientious miniſter, as his deſpair of ſucceſs.

To deny or to conceal the imperfections of the Clergy would be uſeleſs and abſurd. But let them not be viewed with a more cenſorious or a more jealous eye than the reſt of their fellow chriſtians. Their profeſſion and their knowledge ſtrengthen the common obligation to a life of purity and holineſs, but do not exempt them from the infirmities of man. Some of them, who have arrived to affluence and ſplendour, are enjoying the rewards of former diligence, and acknowledged ingenuity. And with the evils ariſing from neglected worth they are not chargeable. The ordinary duties of their profeſſion may be performed by men of moderate attainments. But if any

one, neglecting literature, ſhould confine his attention to the common parochial functions, or, on the contrary, ſhould in the ſcholar forget the amiable character of the good ſhepherd, he would neither find nor deſerve an advocate. A proper regard to eſſentials, joined with a little knowledge of the world, ſeems to characterize the clergy of the preſent age, and they that are otherwiſe will not be hid: their brethren will not attempt their vindication.

The wholeſome practice of catechetical inſtruction has been adopted and purſued with advantage, which yet would be greater, if maſters of families acted as faithful auxilliaries. This would leſſen the number of conventicles more than a thouſand arguments, this would convince ſectaries that we are as zealous as themſelves.

We abound with books of devotion, and ſpiritual inſtruction, ſuited to all capacities. But the diſtribution of them produces little effect. They muſt be anſwerable for the complaint who have occaſioned it. Let ſuch impediments be no diſcouragement. Prudence and perſeverance may overcome the greateſt difficulties. He who cauſed water to iſſue

from

from the hard rock, can bring about the nobleſt events from the moſt improbable cauſes.

The attempts to overturn our Eſtabliſhment have met with no ſucceſs equal to the ſanguine expectations of our adverſaries. The number of the diſcontented bears no proportion to the whole eccleſiaſtick body; many of whom ſearch the Scriptures, peruſe the Fathers, and conſult every ſource of information with unremitting zeal and induſtry. The ſpirit of enquiry ought not to be reſtrained by human laws, and to that ſpirit alone we wiſh to be indebted for the permanence of our Church.

Speculative opinions make but few proſelytes among the people. They are generally averſe to thoſe diſcourſes which call in queſtion the divinity of Jeſus Chriſt. They cannot enter into abſtruſe reaſoning, or underſtand a long train of refined argumentation. We therefore ſpeak in general terms concerning the myſteries of religion, and we endeavour to convince them of the neceſſity of learning. We leave to Enthuſiaſm the abſurdity of giving them the Scriptures, and

deſiring them to form a ſyſtem for themſelves. It is to ſupply them with armour, which, without the aſſiſtance of ſuperior abilities, they cannot uſe to advantage.

Among the ignorant of all denominations bigotry reigns in its utmoſt malignity. Mutual accuſations create mutual animoſity, and we can little wonder that names of religious communions ſhould have popular prejudices annexed to them, when places of nativity have ſo often created reproach. The Church of England inſtructs her members to revere the virtue of every age, every country, and every denomination. No error in principle or practice can be a ſubject of cenſure, but that which is publickly avowed and defended. Let the diſgraceful event, which, through the madneſs of a bigotted Miſcreant, threatened deſtruction to the metropolis, be a ſolemn admonition to the intelligent of every communion never to make their appeal to an ignorant multitude.

The proſpect of a general union is probably viſionary. The evils of ſeparation will however be leſſened in proportion as the teachers of every ſect are better informed. If,

as

as ſome Enthuſiaſts would attempt to perſuade us, knowledge of other kinds be of little ſervice in explaining the Scriptures, it ſurely cannot be an impediment; it would create a dignity of character, it would promote a friendly intercourſe, it would preclude illiberal reflections, it would correct aſperity and moroſeneſs.

Let us only contemplate the effects of Learning and Philoſophy through the various kingdoms of Europe. They have united in friendſhip men of almoſt all perſuaſions; they have, as far as their influence extended, for it could not extend to the bulk of mankind, counteracted the dire effects of religious controverſy, hereditary hatred, and national prejudice, and have increaſed not only the power but the deſire of doing good. With what heartfelt pleaſure does every chriſtian remember the Mandate, which, amidſt war, announced peace to the ingenious but unfortunate Navigator, ſo univerſally revered and lamented! With what ſatisfaction does he recollect the humanity of a General, who could mitigate the horrors of a ſiege, and, amidſt the din of arms, could liſten to the calls of compaſſion! Will not this conduct of our

natural enemies put to ſhame and ſilence ſome of our pretended friends? Will it not extinguiſh in ourſelves all rancour and animoſity? Otherwiſe, whatever we may profeſs, the Scriptures will inform us *that we know not what ſpirit we are of.*

Abſolute Predeſtination is now no longer inſiſted on, becauſe not warranted by Scripture. Our Saviour ſilenced the Mother of Zebedee's children, and the improper enquiries of his followers concerning the number of thoſe who ſhould be ſaved. Every one muſt watch over his own conduct, *muſt work out his own ſalvation with fear and trembling. To be ordained to eternal life,* implies no more than a diſpoſition to receive and perform the conditions of the Goſpel. *To make our calling and election ſure* is to evince the ſincerity of our profeſſions by our practice; to acquire a real and ſubſtantial intereſt in the ineſtimable privileges of Chriſtianity. And all the Apoſtle's reaſoning in his epiſtle to the Romans extends no farther than the admiſſion of ſome into the Church of Chriſt, and the rejection of others. In this ſenſe, * It is not of *him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that ſheweth mercy.* Even the glorification,

* Rom. ix. 16.

mentioned

mentioned in Rom. 8. is moſt probably to be underſtood of pre-eminence in this world as Witneſſes, Saints and Martyrs, *as burning and ſhining lights.*

With the preſent ſtate of Religion is naturally connected the accompliſhment of ſuch prophecies as affect this and future ages. Let it be no diſparagement of the learned labours of thoſe who have undertaken to explain ſuch prophecies, if we ſhould acknowledge that many difficulties attend ſo arduous an undertaking.

The Romaniſts are diſpleaſed with the leading principle upon which Proteſtants explain the Book of Revelations, and the other paſſages which refer to latter days. They little conſider that the application is not perſonal, and that it belongs to corruptions, ſome of which they themſelves have formally renounced. * One of their very able champions aſſures us, "That to the Pontiff of "Rome belongs no abſolute or deſpotic ju-"riſdiction: That he is as much bound by "the laws of the conſtitution as is the low-

* Mr. Berrington's Reflexions addreſſed to Mr. Hawkins, p. 69.

" eſt member of it. That he has his preroga-
" tive, but that they have their privileges, and
" are independent on him, excepting where
" it has pleaſed the Community, for the ſake
" of unity and good order, to ſurrender into
" his hands a limited ſuperintendence. That
" it is his duty, particularly when immediate
" paſtors neglect theirs, to take care that the
" Chriſtian republick receive no injury; that
" laws, which have been received, be
" duly executed, and that the infraction of
" them, by a co-ordinate puniſhment, be
" chaſtiſed. That with princes or their ſtates
" he has no concern, that thoſe days are gone
" by, and that the time is come when the in-
" fluence of Rome is returning to it's proper
" channel. That when it ſhall be ſeen that
" his kingdom is not of this world, that his
" juriſdiction is benevolent and paternal, that
" he is but the firſt Shepherd, and therefore
" that he is prudent, moderate, patient meek
" and humble, that he is ſuch a head as a
" Chriſtian ſociety requires, then will the
" Biſhop of Rome be reſpected, and on that
" reſpect will be founded an authority ample
" enough to fill the chair of St. Peter."—
The Legiſlative body of this kingdom have declared, by their indulgence, that they no longer

longer fear Papal power, and Papal influence. Perhaps the remaining ſhackles and reſtrictions will be taken away, and connivance, in the mean ſeaſon, will have the ſalutary effect of abrogation. The abſurdity of worſhipping in an unknown tongue is greatly leſſened by a vernacular tranſlation. The inherent merit of good works, and the power of unconditional abſolution, are formally renounced. Theſe are favourable ſymptoms, but the moſt favourable of all is the ſpirit of toleration, which is daily increaſing in Popiſh countries, and would have it's perfect influence, if it were not for fear of the people, who are known to entertain an implacable hatred of Proteſtants, and are taught by ſome to believe them in a ſtate of perdition. The ſame leaven is found amongſt our own populace, but we do not increaſe it by deſcriptions of imaginary danger. If the antichriſtian ſpirit have departed from Rome, her Pontiff cannot be affected by that appellation, which the claims of exorbitant power once deſerved, and her diſciples will experience all the lenity of which they give the example.

Attempts to make proſelytes from the eſtabliſhed Religion of any country are ſeldom attended

attended with ſucceſs, and often create more miſchief than could be compenſated by the greateſt. Converſion is more frequently the effect of inconſtancy than conviction; and it happens in religion, as in politicks, that a revolter often irritates thoſe whom he deſerts, and is deſpiſed by thoſe, with whom he is united. The motives of conduct are thoroughly known to the Searcher of Hearts only, but the moſt ſuperficial obſerver can diſcover, and the moſt candid will acknowledge, that intereſt or indifference has added to every denomination of Chriſtians. The national religion muſt be ſupported and encouraged; this is common prudence and ſelf defence; but he who invites individuals by peculiar liberality and protection to his own perſuaſion, encourages hypocriſy under the idea of advancing true religion. If we could ever hope for thoſe happy days in which a whole phalanx, convinced of the purity of our faith and doctrine, ſhall join with us againſt the common enemy, we might then juſtly triumph, becauſe we might deem the event to proceed from rational conviction. In the mean time, thoſe plans of comprehenſion, which have been propoſed withſo much ſelf-

ſufficiency,

ſufficiency, would, under the pretence of accommodation, end in general confuſion.

It ſeems agreed upon by thoſe, who have ſtudied the language of Prophecy, that before the end of the world there will be a converſion of all mankind to the Chriſtian Faith. The Jews, who during ſo many centuries, have been driven into all kingdoms, and yet remain ſeparate from each, have experienced a ſingular and uncommon fate. They are a living evidence of the Religion they oppoſe, and yet they wait for him, who is already come. It is a prevailing opinion among ſome Chriſtians, that, when they are converted, they will be replaced in their own land. Whereas nothing ſeems more clear than that all thoſe Prophecies, which foretel their return to Mount Sion and to Jeruſalem, may, by an obvious figure, ſignify their admiſſion into the Chriſtian Church. Whether their converſion will be gradual or inſtantaneous, by what means it will be effected, is not neceſſary to be enquired into.

If we were to judge from the preſent appearance of things, we ſhould find little reaſon to ſuſpect that all mankind would ever em-

embrace the Chriſtian Religion. *And yet with God nothing is impoſſible.* Chriſtians have not conducted themſelves in diſtant territories with that meekneſs and moderation which their Religion recommends. To difficulties and obſtacles apparently inſurmountable they have added cruelty and rapacity, they have made impreſſions which time will not ſoon wear away. Let it not however be any diſcouragement either to miſſionaries themſelves, or to thoſe who have ſent them, that their progreſs is but ſlow. They are but in the dawning, they are almoſt in the darkneſs, of that day, which, we truſt, will enlighten the whole intellectual ſyſtem. But let not the ſublimity of prophetick language deceive us. We cannot tell whether this converſion of the whole world imply a converſion of every individual, of every ſequeſtered barbarian. We know in what ſenſe the Goſpel was ſaid to be preached to every creature, and * the Deluge itſelf is thought not to have been univerſal. Nor does a general converſion imply a ſimilarity of ſentiment in the converted. Many of the extravagancies of every denomination are given up, and how many more will hereafter be given up, is impoſſible to conjecture. Every conceſſion brings us nearer

* See the Hon. Daines Barrington's Miſcellanies.

to

to unanimity, though the infirmities of our nature will probably keep us at a conſiderable diſtance from it. But in proportion as men are leſs tenacious of outward modes, and leſs addicted to vain ſpeculations, they will become more attentive to the eſſentials of religion, they will encourage and promote univerſal benevolence.

But ſhould their belief be the ſame, we have no room to hope that their practice will correſpond with the purity of their faith. Amidſt the aſtoniſhing diſcordance of ſentiment which prevails, men are unanimous in maintaining that Vice is odious and deteſtable, that temptations are to be avoided or reſiſted. In whatever ſituation Chriſtians of future ages may be placed, whatever ſources of contention may be ſtopped, whatever ſtrength and ſtablility united endeavours may give to their cauſe, the rewards and puniſhments of another life cannot be painted in more lively colours to them than they are to us. Preſent pleaſure will be equally alluring, the faſhion of the world will change, but moſt probably will retain a conſiderable portion of folly. Indeed, if our Lord's prophecy concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem have any farther ſignificancy reſpecting the end of the

the World, we are fully authorized to believe, that whenever the awful period ſhall arrive, men will be found as inattentive and improvident, as much immerſed in the cares or in the amuſements of life, as they were at the Flood. Let us not infer from hence that moral evil is as unavoidable by man as natural. Every change and every diminution of it proves the contrary. He is often ſo perverſe that he can be wicked even without temptation, he can often ſerve Satan without even the ſhadow of reward. Will the Almighty then ever act irreſiſtibly upon his mind? Will the calls of mercy be louder? Will the offers of grace be more abundant? What then can be done to others which hath not been done unto us?

It is uncertain whether the horrors of war will ceaſe or be alleviated; for we have not found that the fatal experience of more than five thouſand years has been ſufficient to ſheath the ſword, or to leſſen the influence of avarice and ambition. As little cauſe have we to hope that ſtrife and confuſion will ceaſe amongſt individuals. Competition in worldly intereſt will ever create envy and jealouſy.

Many

Many of the calamities and many of the evils of life ariſe from weakneſs and ignorance. How ſhall ſuch weakneſs and ignorance be removed? The bulk of mankind muſt ever be deſtined for employments which preclude intellectual improvement, and refinement of manners, which render them ſtrangers to delicacy and ſenſibility not always to be found even in the Philoſopher or the Scholar.

Every condition of life will have it's temptations; the rich and the powerful will be tempted to forget his Creator, the poor will be tempted to charge him fooliſhly. It may afford us ſome conſolation, that the number of notorious offenders, though great, is not equal to that of paſt ages. Perhaps the difference is owing to ſeverer puniſhment, and more eaſy detection: lenity, and deficiency of legal proof operate only as encouragements.

Commerce itſelf, and commerce can only end with the world, has ſome maxims not altogether reconcileable with true honour and integrity. It has a tendency to contract the mind, to degrade intellectual endowments, and to make the whole dignity of a nation

to

to conſiſt in opulence. While it encourages induſtry, and adds to the accommodation of life, let it have it's proper ſhare of our attention, but the moment it diſparages thoſe inſtitutions which are formed to improve the underſtanding and the heart, let it be deemed hoſtile to religion. As long as the world itſelf endureth, the God of this World will be the object of adoration.

What additional reſtraint can reaſon and religion ever find out for that impetuous time of life in which man is juſtly compared to *a wild aſs's colt?* What new remedy will be found for timid caution, querulous peeviſhneſs, and unaccountable avarice, too frequently attendant upon age? How is it that human nature at this day reſembles ſo exactly the pictures which have been drawn many hundred years ago? What enchantment, what miracle, what alteration of circumſtances, ſhall effect this imaginary change? Is the world to end, as Poets have told us it firſt began, with a golden age?

Whatever is meant by Satan's being bound a thouſand years, we are told * *that after the*

* Rev. xx. 7, 8.

*thouſand*

*thouſand years he ſhall be looſed from his priſon. And ſhall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, the number of whom is as the ſand of the ſea.*

If all this be antecedent to the new ‡ *Heavens and the new Earth, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs*, what ground have we to think that any part of the human race will live in a ſtate of purity and perfection, while confined in theſe tabernacles of clay? We leſſen the evidence of prophecy, when the events are improbable which we ſuppoſe to be foretold. In Religion much is left to the agency and the prudence of man. Succeſs has been erroneouſly urged by ſeveral parties as an argument of the favour of Providence.

The promiſe of our bleſſed Lord is a general one, and ought not to be appropriated to any communion. * *He is ever preſent with the humble and contrite ſpirit.*

To the learned as well as the unlearned many of the decrees of Providence are as a

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 13. * Matt. xxviii. 20.

ſealed book. Thoſe prophecies which regard the eſſential parts of Chriſtianity admit of little diſpute, are clear and explicit; thoſe which regard it's future hiſtory will only be underſtood in their completion. In the mean ſeaſon, let our curioſity be reſtrained within it's proper limits, let the oppoſition of our adverſaries increaſe our vigilance, let the profaneneſs of others increaſe our piety, ſo ſhall the works of darkneſs render us more and more the children of light, and the works of Satan may ſhake, if they cannot utterly deſtroy, his own kingdom; ſo ſhall ‡ *we enter that city, which hath no need of the Sun, neither of the Moon to ſhine in it, for the glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*

‡ Rev. xx. 7, 8.

THE END.

B J 6
a

# GLAD TIDINGS
TO
# PERISHING SINNERS:
OR,
# THE GENUINE GOSPEL
A
## COMPLETE WARRANT
FOR THE
# UNGODLY
TO
## BELIEVE IN JESUS.

BY
*ABRAHAM BOOTH.*

NOTHING IS REQUISITE, IN ORDER TO A PARTICIPATION OF CHRIST AND HIS BENEFITS, BUT A GRANT FROM GOD. MR. J. HERVEY.

GOD JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY. THIS IS THAT EXPRESSION WHICH HATH STIRRED UP SO MUCH WRATH AMONG MANY, AND ON ACCOUNT WHEREOF SOME SEEM TO BE MUCH DISPLEASED WITH THE APOSTLE HIMSELF. DR. J. OWEN.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR;
AND SOLD BY W. BUTTON, PATERNOSTER ROW; AND T. KNOTT, LOMBARD STREET.

M.DCC.XCVI.